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Special Panel 20: Mysteries of Scholarship, chair William Naufftus

Friday, Oct. 24, 5:15 pm, Juniper Room

**BARKING DOGS AND DEAF EARS: THE MYSTERIOUS UNHEEDED
SCOTTISH ORIGIN OF TENNYSON'S *IN MEMORIAM***

Patrick Scott, *University of South Carolina*

I want to begin by conflating two literary passages. The first is the obvious allusion in my title, to the exchange in Conan Doyle's story "Silver Blaize," between Inspector Gregory and Sherlock Holmes, as echoed more recently by Mark Haddon:

"Is there any other point," Gregory asks, "to which you would wish to draw my attention?"

"To the curious incident of the dog in the night-time."

"The dog did nothing in the night-time."

"That was the curious incident."

The second passage is from the opening to T.S. Eliot's play *The Cocktail Party*:

"You've missed the point completely, Julia:

There *were* no tigers. *That* was the point."

What interests me are the mysterious unheeded barking, indeed howling, dogs in Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, though there are of course no barking dogs or baying hounds in *In Memoriam*, and that is the curious point that begs to be demystified. My contention is that the missing dogs are Scottish deerhounds.

This will no doubt seem paradoxical, counter-intuitive, or even willful. There is little evidence that Tennyson ever knew much about Scotland, though he knew and liked Burns, and almost none that he had ever been to Scotland, at least before he went ashore for one day during a well-documented yacht trip through the Hebrides with Gladstone in September 1883, and 1883

is far too late to influence *In Memoriam*.

The contention rests on just two puzzlingly-unTennysonian phrases. The first is in the *In Memoriam* epilogue, where the poet retires after his sister's wedding at Shiplake in the Thames valley, and sees "a shining vapour sail" up and away, not over southern England, but over

. . . every mountain head,
And o'er the friths that branch and spread
Their sleeping silver through the hills.
(*In Memoriam*, Epilogue 113-115; *Poems* 2:456).

There are no mountains, and no friths, in the Thames valley.¹ The second line, in one of the Tennyson notebooks at Harvard, and long unpublished, reads unpromisingly: "Hark! The dogs howl! The sleet-winds blow" (*Poems* [1969] 555-556; cf. *Tennyson Archive* 3:19-20 [Harvard Notebook 16, MS Eng 952, ff. 23 r, v]). That line was written in 1833, just after Tennyson learned of Arthur Hallam's death, and the lines that follow it show Tennyson, not where he actually was, amid the Lincolnshire wolds, but in what is clearly a Scottish landscape:

Blown o'er frore heads of hills I go,
Long narrowing friths and stripes of snow.
(*Poems* 1: 608 ll.3-5).²

Though Hallam Tennyson didn't print that disturbing line about the howling dogs in his 1896 *Memoir* of his father, he did include extracts from the 1833 passage, labeling it "the germ of *In Memoriam*" (*Memoir*, I: 107). Even since Christopher Ricks's publication of the full passage in

¹ Both Scottish dictionaries (DOST, SND) have entries for both forms, firth and frith, as "an arm of the sea, often constituted by the broad estuary of a river" (and etymologically linked to Norse fiord), with firth much more common since 1700 (i.e. in the SND period); for firth, SND comments "Orig. Sc[ottish], but now St[andard] Eng[lish], esp. with reference to Scotland." The OED entries for firth and frith have not apparently been revised since 1896-1898 (i.e. as edited by James Murray), recording both forms in English, and noting firth as "originally a Scots word, introduced into English literary use ca. 1600." Firth becomes archaic or dialectal, with frith perhaps sustained poetically by use in Milton, *Paradise Lost*, II:919 (where the "wary fiend" had to cross "no narrow frith"). Among dialect areas retaining at least occasional metathesis on ir/ri was mid-Lincolnshire: G. Edward Campion, *Lincolnshire Dialects* (Boston: Richard Kay, 1976), 24.

² Frore: frozen, as past participle form of freeze, noted by OED (in an entry unrevised since 1898) as "obsolete except in dialect," but cf. Milton's use in *Paradise Lost*, II: 595.

1969, no source text has been identified which might explain why Tennyson's grief over Hallam might blow him north into or over the otherwise-alien landscape of the Scottish highlands.

The clue to this cultural dislocation lies in a long-unnoticed source for the most memorable phrase in one of Tennyson's most memorable short poems, interestingly another poem on the death of Hallam, again probably written in 1833, the short lyric "Tears, idle tears." It's a Scottish source, and I happened on it myself some years ago quite by accident. As best I can discover, in the more than 150 years since Tennyson's "Tears, idle tears" was first published in *The Princess*, this source has only once previously been mentioned by a Tennyson scholar, buried in the footnotes to a long-superseded and never-standard edition. "Tears, idle tears" concludes, you will recall:

Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,
Tears from the depths of some divine despair
Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes,
In looking on the happy Autumn-fields,
And thinking of the days that are no more
(*Poems* ed. Ricks II. 232).

Each of the four stanzas ends with that same haunting phrase, and while other lines from the poem ("Tears, idle, tears," "some divine despair," "lips that are for others," "Deep as first love") have also passed into the common stock of literary allusion, that repeated conclusion "the days that are no more" is surely among Tennyson's greatest lines.

Surprisingly, in the twentieth century, "Tears, Idle Tears" has been among the more lightly annotated of Tennyson's poems. William J. Rolfe, in his 1890 edition of *The Princess*, citing S.E. Dawson's commentary (Montreal, 1884), traced the origin of the poem to Tennyson's own earlier (and very bad) verses titled "No More," first published in the literary annual *The Gem* (1831), which have only a partial anticipation of Tennyson's later refrain:

Oh sad *No More!* O sweet *No more!*
O strange *No more!*

(*Poems* ed. Ricks I.175; cf. Rolfe 167).

Christopher Ricks, in his authoritative Longmans Annotated Tennyson, cites along with the verses from *The Gem* two word-for-word anticipations of Tennyson's refrain, in two poems by Robert Southey: Southey's "To a Friend" and his "Remembrance," which uses the exact phrase "the days that are no more" twice in the text and once in an epigraph (*Poems* ed. Ricks 2: 232-233 note). Ricks also notes a further close anticipation of the refrain in Arthur Hallam's poem "Scene at Rome," in Hallam's line "the silent things that are no more," and, in annotating the poem from *The Gem*, Ricks suggests an allusion to Shelley's "A Lament," with its refrain "No more--Oh, never more!" (*Poems* ed. Ricks I 175 note).

But Ricks's depth of annotation has been untypical. For many years, following Cleanth Brooks's critique in "The Motivation of Tennyson's Weeper," "Tears, idle tears" featured chiefly as a textbook case-study for New Critical analysis, and the rules of that game meant that even Tennyson's defenders had to forswear the exploration of allusion. Tennyson's own comment, first reported by Anne Thackeray Ritchie and also included in variant form in Hallam Tennyson's Eversley annotations, was that "this song came to me on the yellowing autumn-tide at Tintern Abbey, full to me of its bygone memories," neatly diverting attention from any literary precursor other than the eminently-respectable Wordsworth (*Works* 4:255; cf. Ritchie, cited in Rolfe 168; cf. Griffiths). Harold Bloom, characteristically but irrefutably, has asserted that, because "Tears, idle tears" shows no overt echo of Keats, the real source that Tennyson must be repressing is Keats's "Ode to Autumn" (Bloom 161-164). More recently, in a brilliant short book, Seamus Perry has emphasized the poem's style as Tennyson's own, with a distinctively Tennysonian "negative grammar," where "in a characteristically Tennysonian way, the phrase

itself ‘the days that are no more’, brings to mind the perplexing presentness of the past it elegizes,” and where “‘Things that are no more’ do not disappear from view so much as enter a new, paradoxical, Tennysonian kind of perpetuity” (Perry 51-52). And one might instance also Timothy Peltason’s earlier comment that “the feel here is thoroughly Tennysonian” (Peltason, 50). All and any of which may I suppose be true.

But, however Tennysonian the phrase sounds or feels, it was not, or not originally, Tennyson’s own. It was Scottish. James Macpherson’s “Conlath and Cuthona: A Poem” opens with this (rhetorical) question:

Did not Ossian hear a voice? Or is it the sound of days that are no more? Often
does the memory of former times come like the evening sun upon my soul.
(*Poems* ed. Gaskill 124).

This parallel has, to the best of my knowledge, been noted only once, in small print, in 1902, in John Churton Collins’s annotated text of Tennyson’s *The Princess* (pp. 205-206). Like Rolfe and Ricks, Collins gives priority in his footnote to Tennyson’s own early poem “No More,” but he then adds that “With the sentiment of this poem may be compared Macpherson’s *Ossian, Conleth [sic] and Cuthona, ad init.*” and quotes the three sentences above. Collins’s lead-in, “With the sentiment . . . may be compared,” seems non-committal, tentative, even reluctant, but by 1902 Collins had good reason to be ambivalent about asserting newly-discovered sources for Tennyson. Tennyson, Hallam Tennyson, and Tennyson’s friends had all poured scorn on Collins’s earlier attempts to track Tennyson’s borrowings from the classics, and if Tennyson himself never called Collins “a louse upon the locks of literature,” no one was surprised when Edmund Gosse mischievously claimed that he had done so.

What is perhaps surprising is that no subsequent Tennyson scholar seems to have taken up Collins’s almost shame-faced comparison. The parallel to Ossian is mentioned neither in the

notes to Hallam Tennyson's long-standard Eversley Edition, nor in Ricks. There's no reference to Macpherson or Ossian in John Killham's authoritative monograph on the sources of *The Princess*. There appears to be no reference linking Tennyson and Ossian among the 5000 entries in Kirk Beetz's copious if not exhaustive bibliography of Tennyson criticism through 1982. W.D. Paden's groundbreaking study of Tennyson's early reading, *Tennyson in Egypt* (1940), does document a number of Ossianic references in the Tennyson boys' first book, *Poems by Two Brothers* (1827), and two more recent scholars have explored Tennyson's Ossianic reading, Fiona Stafford building on Paden in noting explicit Ossianic references and finding a more general Ossianic aura in Tennyson's earliest poems, and Dafydd Moore exploring Tennyson's allusions to Ossian in *Idylls of the King*. But none of the above link Ossian to "Tears, Idle Tears," or indeed identify any other Ossianic echoes in Tennyson's great middle period, from the death of Hallam to the publication of *Maud*.

For several years after I came on Macpherson's "days that are no more," I believed that there was no reason to doubt that this haunting phrase originated with Macpherson himself. A preliminary check of that old standby, Sir Charles Chadwyck-Healey's English Poetry Database, had yielded no other instances of "the days that are no more" in eighteenth-century poetry, nor in the poetry of any earlier century.³ By contrast, the phrase "idle tears," from Tennyson's first line, turns up in the database in poet after poet, as, presumably, a standard eighteenth-century

³ In the discussion here I have omitted any consideration of the parallel phrase "the years that are no more," also first recorded as Scottish, indeed Ossianic, in origin: see John Smith, *Gallic Antiquities: consisting of ... A Dissertation on the Authenticity of the Poems of Ossian, and A Collection of the Ancient Poems Translated from the Galic of Ullin, Ossian, Orran, &c.* (Edinburgh: for T. Cadell, London, and C. Elliot, Edinburgh, 1780), p. 208; found by Google in two pre-Tennysonian preachers (J. S. Clarke, *Naval Sermons*, 1798, p. 181; Joseph Fawcett, *Sermons at the Sunday-Evening Lecture*, 1801, p. 317); used by e.g. Caroline Norton in the 1820s (*The Sorrows of Rosalie*, 1829, p. 2), and now more usually cited from Matthew Arnold's poem "Growing Old," line 20, first published in his *New Poems* (1867), and annotated by e.g. Kenneth Allott only as an echo of Tennyson's phrasing. And perhaps, further back, behind both phrases, one might hear echoes of Vergil, *Aeneid*, VIII, line 560: "*O mihi praeteritos referat si Jupiter annos*," "O that God might bring back to me the years that are gone by [*praeteritos annos*]." If Vergil seems unlikely, one notes that, in early life, before his Ossianic fragments brought him fame, Macpherson was a schoolmaster.

English rendering of its Virgilian original *lacrimae inanes* (Mustard 103; *Poems* ed. Ricks II 232 note; cf. Turner 110).

But the version of Chadwyck-Healey I had used covered only poetry, not drama, and I was temporarily dismayed when I recently discovered the phrase in David Mallet's 1731 verse-drama *Eurydice*, Act III, scene VII, when Periander, King of Corinth, upbraids his queen

Eurydice:

What was my crime? Can all-bestowing love
Do more than mine for thee? ----When I call back
The days that are no more! Thou wert my all
Of happiness: my soul ne'er knew a Joy
That was not thine: my doating fondness lull'd
Its hopes, its fears, its wishes, in thy bosom (Mallet, 51).

My dismay was temporary, mitigated by remembering that Mallet, however expatriate, was also a Scot. One cannot rule out the possibility, even the probability, that Macpherson, in composing his "translations" from fragments of traditional oral poetry, had been remembering Mallet, whose reputation one must presume was higher in the 1750s and 1760s than it has been since. But the catalogue of Tennyson's father's library at Somersby, like that of Tennyson himself at Farringford, shows no copy of Mallet's play, nor of Mallet's collected plays, nor of Bell's British Theatre which had reprinted Mallet's play. Moreover, the context in Mallet's play, of heterosexual recrimination, and the tone, of subShakespearean pastiche, seem grotesquely inappropriate as unconscious source, let alone conscious private allusion, for Tennyson in lamenting the death of Arthur Hallam.

The more realistic question, then, is whether Tennyson found the phrase in Macpherson, or whether he came to it in some more recent publication, for instance in Southey.⁴ Tennyson

⁴ I ignore here any likelihood that Tennyson had picked up the phrase from one of a handful of other authors using it, whom I am assuming had lifted it from Mallet, or Macpherson, or Southey: see, e.g., Mrs. Bennett, *Agnes De-*

certainly had access to Macpherson's *Ossian*. His father's library at Somersby Rectory, now preserved in the Tennyson Research Centre in Lincoln, has a copy of the *Poems of Ossian*, published in 1809 by Suttaby of London, and it is signed on the front-free endpaper "A. Tennyson," which means it was one of the books from the Somersby library that Tennyson took with him to school or college or retained after his father's death in 1831 (Campbell 165, item 244).⁵ In the 1809 edition, the source passage for "the days that are no more" occurs on p. 482. By contrast, curiously enough, neither the Somersby library, nor Tennyson's own library, also at Lincoln, contain any collection of Southey's poems (cf. Campbell 20 and 96).⁶

There is also clear evidence that in the Somersby years Tennyson had read, or at least read in, Macpherson's *Ossian*. In one of his earliest letters, written when he was perhaps fifteen, Tennyson boasts as a stylistic influence on his poetic effusions the "Ossianic," as well as the "Miltonic, Byronic, Milmanic, Morrish, Crabick," and "Coleridgick" (*Letters* 1.3). The "Southeyick" is not in the list, and no entry for Southey occurs in the index to volume I of the Lang and Shannon *Letters*. As Paden and Stafford note, Tennyson explicitly, even proudly, asserted the influence of *Ossian* in his first published book, *Poems by Two Brothers* (1827), in which four of his contributions carry explicit reference to *Ossian*. Most substantially, Tennyson acknowledges in a footnote that an unspecified number of lines in his poem "Midnight" "are a paraphrase of *Ossian*" (*Poems by Two Brothers* 87; *Poems* ed. Ricks 1:124). In fact, Tennyson

Courci, A Domestic Tale, 4 vols. (Bath: for the Author, 1789), 4: 29-31; Anon., "On Fortitude of Mind," in *Address to a Young Lady on Her Entrance into the World*, 2 vols. (London: for Hookham and Carpenter, 1796, 22; William Curtis of Annaghmore, "Lines [on leaving Ireland]," *Poems in Two Volumes* (London: for the Author, 1820), 2:207.

⁵ This edition (London: Suttaby, 1809, in two volumes) appears to be an unrecorded *Ossian* reprint: G. F. Black's standard listing records for Suttaby only a two-volume edition in 1807, while the 1809 Suttaby edition in the G. Ross Roy Collection at the University of South Carolina is in one volume. Ms. Grace Timmins rechecked the Tennyson Research Center copy for me (of which only volume one is now present) and reported that the engraved title-page has the words "In Two Volumes" and the date 1809. On the Somersby library, cf. Moore, Lang's introduction in Campbell, Hixson and Scott (noting the *Ossian* edition but not this echo, p. 193), and Shatto.

⁶ Nor do the libraries record copies of anthologies reprinting Southey's "Rememberance," such as *The Annual Anthology*, 1 (Bristol: Biggs, for Longman and Rees, London, 1799), 29-31.

echoes closely for the next eighteen lines Macpherson's "The Song of the Five Bards," which Macpherson printed as an extended footnote to *Croma*, not as a separate work (*Poems* 1809 208-221; *Poems* ed. Gaskill 190-192; for specific verbal parallels from Ossian, see *Poems* ed. Ricks 1: 124). The relevant Tennyson passage includes the relevant couplet:

And, mingled with the rising roar, is swelling,
From the far hunter's booth, the blood hound's yelling.
(*Poems by Two Brothers* 87; *Poems* ed. Ricks 124)

Interestingly, the 1827 volume has references to Ossian only in poems by Alfred Tennyson himself. His older brothers Frederick and Charles were apparently indifferent to the Ossianic enchantment.

If it can be so clearly established that the young Tennyson had access to Ossian, recognized the poetic influence of Ossian in a letter, and acknowledged a debt to Ossian in other poems, why would Macpherson's exact anticipation of "the days that are no more" not be given credit as Tennyson's source? One might posit several explanations.

First, Tennyson's initial response to Ossian had been when he was a provincial adolescent, isolated with his father's books in a Lincolnshire rectory fifteen miles from the nearest market town. Once he found himself at Cambridge, a provincial hobbadihoy among Hallam's Etonian and Apostolic friends, Apostles, or as he put it "a barndoor fowl among peacocks," he quickly learnt that Ossian was, not just suspect as to authenticity, but oldfashioned. Significantly, there is no reference to Ossian in the letters of Hallam or in those of another Cambridge friend Edward Fitzgerald.⁷ For Hallam's generation, Shelley and Wordsworth had displaced Byron and Ossian. Tennyson himself never reprinted any of his

⁷ I am emboldened in this claim by an informal assurance from Hallam's editor, Prof. Jack Kolb, that he could not recall Hallam referring to Ossian either.

teenage poems from the 1827 volume, and he was furious when other people pirated them.

Second, when the mature Tennyson turned back to Celtic sources for poetic inspiration, in the late 1840's, the focus of Celtic studies had moved, with Irish scholars seizing on the earlier Ossianic controversy to assert the superior authenticity of their traditions. In his reading for what would become *Idylls of the King*, Tennyson went well beyond his original source, Malory, but the books he took up were now Welsh rather than Scottish or Irish (Scott). And, third, of course, in the later years of his life, Tennyson became extremely defensive about the growth of modern literary scholarship, or indeed anything that seemed to question his originality. Churton Collins had characterized Tennyson as belonging to a class of poets “essentially imitative and reflective,” praised “his wondrous assimilative skill,” which explicitly denying that the “interesting and instructive parallel passages” he had compiled constituted “a catalogue of plagiarisms” (Collins “New Study” 36, 37; “New Study II” 35). In his copy of Collins’s article, Tennyson has scrawled furious marginalia, along with the put-down “It is the unimaginative man who thinks everything borrowed” (Martin 529). But the stubborn fact of Collins’s discovery, and Tennyson’s borrowing from Ossian, remains, a well-concealed scholarly landmine.

Ossian had clearly been a major stimulus or influence on the early Tennyson, but at Cambridge, before the death of Hallam, Tennyson had to accept the by-then-dominant consensus that Ossian had been evaporated, that he may never have existed, that there was no historical basis for writings that once had meant so much. Over time, Tennyson seems to have been attracted by the duality or paradox, that the spirit, even the words, of Ossian lived on, even though his historical existence and the authenticity of the books that bore his name could no longer be publicly asserted without ridicule. Documentation for Tennyson’s continuing interest in Ossian reemerges only in the late 1850's, when he added to the Farringford library a volume of

the *Poems of Oisín* (Campbell 1:81 item 1720). A few years later, in 1875, when Tennyson visited the Scots poet and novelist George MacDonald, he borrowed “a splendid copy of the Gaelic Ossian”: “he had never believed Ossian was a reality,” MacDonald reported, “but seemed a good deal more ready to believe in him when he had read a few lines” (*Letters* 3:99 n.1). In the epilogue to *Idylls of the King*, added in 1872 when Tennyson first arranged the separate poems to form a still-fragmentary and discontinuous epic, he contrasted his own “imperfect tale” of Arthur with the Arthur of his sources, not only with Geoffrey of Monmouth and Malory, but also with a still older and more elusive Arthur

. . . that gray king, whose name, a ghost,
Streams like a cloud, man-shaped, from mountain peak,
And cleaves to cairn and cromlech still.

(*Poems of Tennyson*, 3: 36-45)

Tennyson is no longer imitating or borrowing from Ossian, but instead is now writing a kind of metapoetry, about his retrospective feelings for the poet he had once so admired but whose very existence had since been called into question. (There is perhaps a parallel here not only to his interest in the Arthurian legends, as historians sought to differentiate between an historical Arthur and literary mythmaking, and a parallel too to the developing ideas of Tennyson’s theological friends such as Jowett towards biblical scholarship, in *Essays and Reviews*, 1859.)

The Ossian borrowing in “Tears, idle tears” might make one look again also at another, more extensive Tennyson poem that, like “Tears, idle tears,” concerns Tennyson’s grief at the death of a later, closer, Arthur, looking again at those mysteriously friths and mountains in the *In Memoriam* epilogue, and even at the howling dogs in the discarded section that Hallam Tennyson called the “germ” of the poem. On hearing of Hallam’s death, Tennyson’s first recourse was evidently to Macpherson’s Ossian. He recalled or perhaps even reread a quite

specific work, the Macpherson/Ossian *Fingal*, and a quite specific passage in the fifth book of *Fingal*, the hero's lament after the death of Ryno. There, Fingal laments that the dead Ryno's "faithful dogs howl on the hills." Fingal promises: "Fingal shall soon behold thee. Soon shall my voice be heard no more, and my footsteps cease to be." He sees "as in a vision the silent chief, as a wreath of mist ascending a hill." He asks

what must the grief of Ossian be, for thou thyself art gone. I hear not thy distant voice on Cona. My eyes perceive thee not. Often forlorn and dark I sit at thy tomb; and feel it with my hands. When I think I hear thy voice; it is but the blast of the desert.

(*Poems of Ossian* 1809 311-316; *Poems of Ossian* ed. Gaskill 93-95).

So much of Tennyson's response to the death of Hallam is already in these lines, even his recurrent imagery of touching and feeling and hands. And it is present too in what Hallam Tennyson asserted were his father's very first lines of poetry responding to Arthur Hallam's death. Listen to these lines from "the germ of *In Memoriam*," in the Harvard Tennyson notebooks:

Hark! The dogs howl! The sleetwinds blow . . .
I leave the dreaming world below,
Blown o'er frore heads of hills I go,
Long narrowing friths and stripes of snow--
Time bears my soul into the waste.
I seek the voice I loved--ah where
Is that dear hand that I should press,
Those honoured brows that I would kiss? . . .
The vapour labours up the sky,
Uncertain forms are darkly moved,
Larger than human passes by
The shadow of the man I loved.

Tennyson's mode of reading a book throughout his life was to fix on individual phrases or short sentences, rather than on complete passages. I have no doubt that further scrutiny will show borrowings in *In Memoriam* from other sections of *Fingal* or other poems of Macpherson's

Ossian, as well as allusions to Ossian scattered through many of the individually-drafted cantos that would make up *In Memoriam*. One might speculate on why Tennyson should pour his first grief into the formulas of the Ossianic lament--the freedom of feeling, perhaps, the privateness of a poetic voice so different from the formal voice of Victorian consolation, the Ossianic fluidity of gender in the expression of emotion--, and such speculations would surely also go part way to explain Tennyson's apparent repression, both before and after Hallam's death, of any explicit Ossianic affinity.

Yet in the first bleak winter weeks of grief, it was in Ossian that Tennyson found his voice, and the germ of his greatest poem, just as it was in Ossian that he had found the most Tennysonian phrase in "Tears, idle tears." There are no barking dogs in *In Memoriam*, but there originally were, before Tennyson cut them out. That is what was curious.

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