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Tennyson's Arthurian Quest:
The *Idylls of the King* in relation to
his Poetic Development

by

Barbara R. Baker, B.A. (Hons.)

A thesis submitted to the Faculty
of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
Department of English

Carleton University

Ottawa, Ontario

April 6, 1987

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his Poetic Development
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Thesis Supervisor

Chairman, Department of English

Carleton University

April 28, 1987

ABSTRACT

This Thesis examines the evolution of Tennyson's treatment of the Arthurian legend in relation to his poetic development, establishing the connections between the first edition of the *Idylls of the King* and his early Arthurian work, and showing how the 1859 *Idylls* determine the design for the cycle completed in 1885.

Chapter One reviews Tennyson's poetic development to 1850, identifying the stylistic and thematic patterns of his 'private' and 'social' vision which would shape the composition of the 1859 *Idylls*. Chapter Two examines *The True and the False Idylls*, observing how the poet adapts his medieval sources to create a vision of the destruction of the Arthurian Order which is both rooted in his preoccupation with the problem of the divided will and informed with his conception of marriage as the model for social relationship. Here Tennyson's treatment of structure, character, and landscape is designed to focus on emotional and spiritual experience, as the poet stresses the importance of personal order to the support of social order. Chapter Three demonstrates how Tennyson, working from the structural and thematic framework in the 1859 *Idylls* expands and completes his Arthurian *opus*.

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QUOTATIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

All quotations from Tennyson's work will be taken from the Longmans' annotated edition of his *Poems*, edited by Christopher Ricks (1969), with the numbers of the lines quoted given in brackets. When references are made to the *Idylls of the King*, the titles of the individual idylls will be designated by the following abbreviations:

"Balin and Balan"	<i>BB</i>
"The Coming of Arthur"	<i>CA</i>
"Guinevere"	<i>G</i>
"Geraint and Enid"	<i>GE</i>
"Gareth and Lynette"	<i>GL</i>
"The Holy Grail"	<i>HG</i>
"Lancelot and Elaine"	<i>LE</i>
"The Last Tournament"	<i>LT</i>
"The Marriage of Geraint"	<i>MG</i>
"Merlin and Vivien"	<i>MV</i>
"The Passing of Arthur"	<i>PA</i>
"Pelleas and Ettarre"	<i>PE</i>

INTRODUCTION

Tennyson's Arthurian quest spanned the course of his creative life. His son records that, "The vision of Arthur . . . had come upon [him] when, little more than a boy, [he] first lighted upon Malory; and it dwelt with him to the end" (*Memoir* 2: 128). While the imaginative impulse remained constant, the poet's treatment of the material over more than fifty years necessarily reflects his development as an artist. The completed *Idylls of the King* present the fullest expression of life-long preoccupations, giving "his innermost being more fully, though not more truly, than *In Memoriam*" (*Memoir* 2: 128). In relation to the development of Tennyson's art, however, the first four *Idylls*, published in 1859, pose an intriguing critical problem.

Tennyson's poetic development is traditionally described in terms of a movement from isolation to social commitment, from withdrawal into art to involvement with the "broad and common interests of the time and of universal humanity" (*Memoir* 1: 123). The 1859 *Idylls* have been generally regarded as expressions of his social vision. Although a few contemporary reviewers complained of the Arthurian subject's 'remoteness', and Ruskin regretted Tennyson's failure to address "the facts of modern life," (*Memoir* 1: 453), the original critical response was favourable. Praising "the chastity and moral elevation of this volume," Gladstone saw it as "another forward and upward stride, . . . perhaps the greatest of all, in his career" (in Jump 263). "Mr. Tennyson has sided with the world", declared Walter Bagehot, welcoming the 1859 *Idylls* as the poet's final rejection of his morbid, introspective vein, in favour of a wider, healthier social focus (in Jump 219-20).

Early in the twentieth century, this social focus became suspect. Preferring the work of "the black, unhappy mystic" to the later productions of a "second-rate instructional bard", Harold Nicolson dismissed the *Idylls* as "intellectually insincere" (231), thus confirming the critical division between the lyric vision of the 'private'

Tennyson and the didactic voice of the 'public' Laureate. Commentators have recently begun to reconsider the period that Nicolson had labelled "the unfortunate, mid-Victorian, phase of Tennyson's development" (229), and are reappraising his social vision. However, the critical division continues to influence discussion of the poet's work. Kerry McSweeney, for example, distinguishes between those *Idylls of the King* which recall "the private, introspective Tennyson", and those written "by the public, laureate Tennyson;" i.e. the 1859 *Idylls* (103).

Originally entitled, *The True and the False: Four Idylls of the King*, the 1859 *Idylls* present portraits of "women, [who differ] worst and best, as Heaven and Hell" (MV 813). The dutiful wife "Enid", and "Elaine", "the lily maid of Astolat", are set in contrast to the faithless "Vivien" and adulterous "Guinevere". According to McSweeney, Tennyson's vision in these poems is limited to narrow moral considerations: "they are principally concerned with sexual purity and fidelity, with what Swinburne called 'the Albertine ideal'" (99). For Gerhard Joseph, the polarization of woman is most remarkable (125). Joseph links Tennyson's shift from female to male protagonists and subsequent characterization of woman as *femme fatale* or 'angel in the house' with the movement from the lyric voice expressing the private vision to the didactic tone of the social (73-74).

Certainly, the polarization of woman in the 1859 *Idylls* is immediately striking and quite deliberate, yet close reading reveals that these women are complex creations. Moreover, the 'true/false' motif is characteristic of that "fondness for bringing opposites into focus," identified by Martin Dodsworth (28), which informs the poet's work from the beginning. While illuminating the healing power of 'true' love and the destructive potential of passion, the 'true/false' framework does not impose a narrow moral scheme, but establishes "Tennyson's vision of the doubleness of things" (Dodsworth 24), which extends throughout the *Idylls*.

In fact, the 1859 *Idylls* reveal clear connections with the earlier lyric work and set the design for the completed *opus*. As J.M. Gray observes, "The central act of the *Idylls* is a fall" ("Two Transcendental Ladies" 104). The fall underlies Tennyson's earliest conception of Camelot, as natural forces threaten "the sacred Mount" (1833), and it forms the structure of the first idyll composed, "Merlin and Vivien" (1856). Here Tennyson's fascination with and fear of the sensual which had created the tension in many of the earlier works reappears. A fatal paralysis of will becomes the imaginative and structural centre of the *Idylls*, as Arthur's ideal, embodied in the image of "a Gardener putting in a graff," (*MV* 477) dissolves into that of Merlin, imprisoned "in the hollow oak . . . / And lost to life and use and name and fame" (*MV* 967-68). The next three idylls repeat the "Merlin and Vivien" pattern of the wasteland quest and imprisonment, focusing again on the psychological experience of the characters.

The 1859 *Idylls* raise questions which are explored throughout the completed work: What makes a man? When does gentleness become weakness? And courtesy, corruption? Above all, Can man be master of his fate? All are 'social', indeed, 'moral' issues in the largest sense, as they are related to the essential question which Matthew Arnold claimed for the poet: "*how to live*".¹ Tennyson, moreover, constructs his answer on the human scale, believing that social order is rooted in internal psychological order (Slinn 6). He offers as Arthur's exemplar, Edyrn, who works his own miraculous "change of heart" using "Both grace and will to pick the vicious quitch / Of blood and custom wholly out of him" (*GE* 902-03). Yet undercutting the possibilities of individual repentance and redemption, and the healing power of love, are problems of paralysis and impotence, the association of

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¹In his "Wordsworth" essay, Arnold writes: "The question, *how to live*, is itself a moral idea; and it is the question which most interests every man, and with which, in some way or another, he is perpetually occupied" (338).

love and death: the preoccupations of Tennyson's 'private' vision continue to shape the 'social' vision of the *Idylls*.

My study of the 1859 *Idylls* in relation to Tennyson's poetic development will examine their links to the earlier poetry and show how they establish the design for the completed *Idylls of the King*. Chapter One will comprise an overview of Tennyson's poetic development to 1850, beginning with a definition of his private vision in terms of thematic and stylistic patterns, and considering his early Arthurian work. Rooted in his fascination for the 'lost paradise', the poet's imaginative vision of the Arthurian legend was also formed by the tragic loss of Arthur Hallam, who inspired Tennyson's conception of his ideal leader.

The most remarkable difference between the poet's original treatments of the Arthurian myth and *The True and the False Idylls* is the focus on marriage in these poems, so the role of the domestic element in Tennyson's evolving social vision will be dealt with next. Marriage becomes a central metaphor in his work, representing Tennyson's "escape from isolation" into "relationship with the world" (Pitt 146). The view of marriage presented in *The Princess* (1847) is essential to the social vision of the *Idylls*. In *The Princess*, sexual confusion is ultimately resolved in a "true marriage", a union of "perfect music unto noble words". Tennyson here conceives marriage as the ideal relationship, one capable of uniting substance and shadow, emotional reality and spiritual ideal, and as such, it is to be a vital factor in the foundation and destruction of Arthur's realm.

Chapter Two will examine the 1859 *Idylls*. The irreconcilability of real and ideal which had appeared in the earlier work as the conflict between the life of the imagination and emotional experience, dominates *The True and the False Idylls*, as Tennyson concentrates upon the difficulties of relationship, which culminate in the failure of Arthur's marriage and dissolution of his Order. The narrative structure of

the four idylls also suggests echoes of the lyric voice, mourning "the days that are no more", for each one begins in *medias res*, then moves back to focus on an irrecoverable past. In addition, discussion of the poet's masterly evocation of character and mood through sensual imagery, his treatment of landscape, and suggestive use of dreams in these idylls all recall previous patterns, thus demonstrating the effect of the 'private' vision on Tennyson's 'public' poetry. Most importantly, however, the structural and thematic motifs established in these poems provide the framework for the composition of additional *Idylls of the King*.

In Chapter Three, the final stages of Tennyson's Arthurian quest will be examined in a discussion focusing on the *Idylls* published in 1869. Beginning with "The Holy Grail", the poet expands the domestic vision of the 'True/False' group, to consider other factors involved in the disintegration of the Round Table. After returning to and further developing the problems of relationship in "Pelleas and Ettarre", Tennyson next creates a formal introduction and conclusion for his Arthurian *opus*. Finally, with the integration of later additions reinforcing the natural cycle which forms the larger structure of the work, we will observe how the poet extends and completes his vision of the establishment, flowering, and decline of the Arthurian realm in his *Idylls of the King*.

CHAPTER ONE

From "All good things are in the west" to "The holy power of Love"

The course of Tennyson's poetic development is generally regarded as a movement from isolation in the creation of art to involvement with larger social themes. For some critics, this means viewing the process as a transformation "from a wholly Romantic into a largely Victorian poet" (McSweeney xv), which can, in turn, lead to a narrow reading of the Laureate's work. Other commentators focus on the essential sameness of Tennyson's preoccupations and the recurrence of recognizable patterns—principally the "characteristic ambiguity" throughout the body of his work (Danzig 557).

The key events in the poet's life appear to fit the traditional 'pattern of conversion'. His childhood experience of 'the black blood of the Tennysons', followed by the tragic loss of Arthur Hallam, then the long period of personal and financial insecurity, and at mid-life, peace and stability achieved with the success of *In Memoriam* and his marriage, correspond with the conversion of "the black, unhappy mystic" into "the prosperous Isle-of-Wight Victorian" (Nicolson 15). While this familiar outline may serve as a starting point, it quickly becomes apparent that Tennyson's poetic development was not so straightforward. The creative response to so many variables—psychological needs, emotional experience, historical and critical pressures—is a complex process which should not be reduced to a formula.

Certainly, Tennyson's experience of loss profoundly marked his early work, yet we can observe its effect in the work of his maturity. As John Rosenberg remarks in "Tennyson and the Landscape of Consciousness", "Dreams, madness, doubt, suicide, and death are very much Tennyson's themes, but they figure as prominently in his later poetry, when he was Laureate, as in his earlier" (305). On

the other hand, the 'social' impulse of the Laureate began very early, stimulated by the earnest influence of the Apostles at Cambridge, who urged on the young Tennyson an exalted sense of the poet's duty.

In order to gain some insight into the complex process which shaped the conception and creation of the 1859 *Idylls of the King*, Chapter One will review Tennyson's poetic development to 1850. I will begin by defining Tennyson's 'private' vision, identifying characteristic motifs in the poems of the 1830s which will reappear in the *Idylls*. Following a thematic, rather than a strictly chronological approach, the early Arthurian work, which extends from 1830-42, will be discussed in terms of the private vision. Next, new patterns appearing in poems composed during the same period will be considered. Finally, the evolution of Tennyson's social vision, as it appears in the *Poems* (1842) and *The Princess* (1847), with its implications for the treatment of 'The True and the False' *Idylls* will complete the discussion of Tennyson's poetic development to 1850.

Tennyson's private vision begins with a focus on the inner life. His own temperamental need to withdraw, intensified by his boyhood experience of 'the black blood of the Tennysons' formed the pattern of escape from disordered reality to the order of the imagination. A profusion of lush, sensual images characterizes the early poems in which beauty serves as the medium of withdrawal. Tennyson uses physical detail, usually of landscape, to create mood, presenting in many of his *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical* (1830) and *Poems* (1832), "states of emotion, embodied in sensuous imagery" (Mill in Jump 95). The characteristic state, moreover, is one of isolation/stasis, and among the most successful of the early poems are those which portray some condition of desolation, such as the emotional paralysis conveyed through the dreary landscape of "Mariana". At the same time, isolation/stasis holds the promise of imaginative power, as the poet explores the conditions necessary for creativity in his early work.

In the beginning, isolation and creativity are linked: the imagination flourishes in remote, enchanted gardens. The "dark-browed sophist" is warned not to intrude on the "holy ground" of "The Poet's Mind" which must be protected from the blight of reality. The "High-walled gardens green and old / . . . Of good Haroun Alraschid" offer another exotic retreat. "Recollections of the Arabian Nights", published in the *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical* of 1830, presents some key elements of the private vision, focusing on the inward nature of imaginative escape and on the impact of sensual beauty.

"Recollections" takes the form of a night journey through a magic, motionless landscape to the secret centre of imaginative power. The narrative structure underscores the 'interior' nature of the journey as Tennyson proceeds to withdraw, first along the river of memory. Each splendid scene opens on to one of even greater beauty, as he winds down the Tigris, past inviting pleasure palaces, then through

a broad canal which rounds into a lake, revealing the central fountain. The feeling of enclosure combined with intense sensual appeal, as in "Imbowered vaults of pillared palm, / Imprisoning sweets," (lines 39, 40), is heightened with each successive scene, creating a heady atmosphere, thick with fragrant scents, enchanting song, and visions of "sudden splendour" (line 81).

"Entranced with that place and time," (line 97), the poet enters "another night in night" (37), the dream state which will draw him further into imaginative experience. Again, the lush beauty increases with each image as he passes through the garden, then emerges from "the long alley's latticed shade" (112) to find the dazzling "Pavilion of the Caliphat" (114).

Within he gazes "trancedly" on the lovely Persian girl, then the eye is drawn from the silver columns, to the massive throne, to, at last, the "Sole star of all that place and time, / . . . THE GOOD HAROUN ALRASCHID" (152-54). The mighty ruler appears benevolent, "his deep eye laughter-stirred / With merriment of kingly pride," (150-51), but by presenting the description of his huge throne first, Tennyson creates the impression of some immense force, perhaps only temporarily at rest. In addition, the close connection of sensual beauty with potential danger is an ambiguous and unsettling association, which will be further developed.

The escape to the imagination in "Recollections", then, is linked with memories of a pre-lapsarian past (the world of childhood), with the night, dreams, and above all, with the enchanting, transforming, transcending power of beauty. The magic of the nightingale's song,¹

¹ Although the influence of specific Romantic poets is beyond the scope of the present study, the image of the nightingale reminds us that Tennyson's attitude toward beauty in the early poetry was clearly influenced by Keats. In his discussion "The 'Fatal Woman' Symbol in Tennyson", Clyde de L. Ryals notes that "the Keatsian influence was certainly present in the *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical*" (439), and suggests that the young Tennyson found in Keats "that melancholy and tender wistful strain, that love of sensuous luxury which reflected his own state of mind" (441).

... something which possessed
 The darkness of the world, delight,
 Life, anguish, death, immortal love,
 Ceasing not, mingled, unrepressed, (71-74)

effects the essential detachment, "Apart from place, withholding time," (75), which leads to the source of creative power.

Artistic detachment is further explored in "The Hesperides", written in 1830 and published in 1832. While the sheer abundance and opulence of the imagery throughout "Recollections" can be cloying, "The Hesperides" provides a more effective, yet more enigmatic statement of the private vision. Distinguished by that perfect fusion of landscape and mood, universally admired by commentators from Arthur Hallam (in Jump 42) to Christopher Ricks (cited in Timko 10), the poem locates the psychic state of the artist in a garden paradise, isolated from the world of change, strife, and death.

The prologue marks the transition from external to internal experience.² The explorer Hanno, voyaging "in calmèd bays / Between the southern and the western Horn," (4-5), hears "voices, like the voices in a dream," (12). As Hanno passes to the outer sea, beyond range of the strange song, the reader enters the dream world of the island-garden, where all normal activity is suspended.

In "a land of rest" (94), a magic ritual preserves the treasure, the golden apple, which may represent the mystery of the creative process. "Round about all is mute," (18), all is still, while the incantation of the daughters of Hesperus maintains the trance-like state of purposeful repose in which the imagination is freed.

²Martin Dodsworth comments on the poet's use of the introduction, prologue and/or epilogue as framing devices in "Patterns of Morbidity: Repetition in Tennyson's Poetry". According to Dodsworth, "The frame has a special attraction for Tennyson because it marks not merely the discontinuity of the poem with the world of everyday experience but also the inward nature of its subject matter" (21).

The sisters glory in their power:

Out of watchings, out of wiles,
Comes the bliss of secret smiles.
All things are not told to all. (77-79)

and there is a disturbing, threatening note to their pleasure in "hoarded wisdom" (48), for "the ancient secret" they so jealously guard could heal "the old wound of the world" (69-72). This reinforces the paradisaical character of the island-retreat, and at the same time suggests that the poet is already uneasy about such a remote aesthetic stance. Tennyson may be acknowledging that art must not remain the exclusive privilege of a circle of initiates (Alaya 278-79), but the deliberately hypnotic effect of the poem's beauty works against this concern, particularly in the final section which closes with that circle firmly established, excluding the outside world.

The final section affirms the East/West polarities which divide the real world from that of the imagination.

For the western sun and the western star,
And the low west wind, breathing afar,
The end of day and beginning of night
Make the apple holy and bright. (89-92)

Then, with an image of abundant potential, suggesting growth and movement contained in perfect stillness,

... when the fullfaced sunset yellowly
Stays on the flowering arch of the bough,
The luscious fruitage clustereth mellowly,
Goldenkernelled, goldenbred,
Sunset-ripened above on the tree. (99-103)

Tennyson builds to the culminating vision of creativity in shimmering suspension, in complete detachment from the human condition:

The world is wasted with fire and sword,
But the apple of gold hangs over the sea. (104-05)

"The Hesperides" thus expands the concept of imaginative power presented in "Recollections". Again, the essential separation from reality is effected by the potent charm of song, again imagination thrives in an evening atmosphere of utter calm, in a trance-like or dream state. The pre-lapsarian world of childhood to which Tennyson is drawn in "Recollections", becomes in "The Hesperides", a 'lost paradise', closely identified with the west. "All good things are in the west" (96): in a realm of lush, effortless fertility where creativity blossoms. This, as G. Robert Stange points out, is the land of "The Lotos-Eaters" and "The Sea Fairies" (104): it is also the land of Camelot and Tennyson's early Arthurian work.

Tennyson's involvement with the Arthurian material began with the composition of "Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere", which is recorded as "partly if not wholly written in 1830" (*Memoir* 2: 122). "The Lady of Shalott", written c. May, 1832, was the first Arthurian poem to be published, and it must have stimulated further work on the subject, for Tennyson went on in 1833 to draft the prose sketch presenting his vision of "the sacred Mount of Camelot":

The Mount was the most beautiful in the world, sometimes green and fresh in the beam of morning, sometimes all one splendour, folded in the golden mists of the West. But all underneath it was hollow, and the mountain trembled, when the seas rushed bellowing through the porphyry caves; and there ran a prophecy that the mountain and the city on some wild morning would topple into the abyss and be no more
(*Memoir* 2: 122-23)

This description of "the sacred Mount", which resembles Xanadu in construction, stresses its physical beauty and vulnerability: Camelot is seen as doomed from the beginning, threatened by natural forces and the prophecy of its destruction. The tragic destiny of the Arthurian Order thus forms an essential element in the young

poet's original Romantic conception of the realm.

In 1833 Tennyson is also reported to have returned to the Launcelot piece, now intended as "a companion to 'The Lady of Shalott'" (cited in *Poems* 502). John Kemble's letter to W.B. Donne of 22 June, 1833 (quoted in *Poems* 502-03), includes an account of the proposed "Ballad of Sir Lancelot", with considerable detail of plot and character. Although the plan described by Kemble was not developed, the surviving 'Fragment' was published as "Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere" in 1842. Moreover, in this 'Fragment', we can observe an important source of Tennyson's creative engagement with the Arthurian material.

"Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere" follows the pattern of retreat to a lost paradise of "Recollections" and "The Hesperides". The poem opens with the coming of Spring "in a sun-lit fall of rain" (4). In a beautiful, remote and silent landscape, the natural quickening process is gentle, effortless, harmonious:

And far, in forest-deeps unseen,
The topmost elm-tree gathered green
From draughts of balmy air. (7-9)

The second stanza expands the sensual harmony with sound: the songs of piping linnet and whistling throstle, then the sparrowhawk, hushing "all the groves from fear of wrong", yield to the "fuller sound" of "the yellowing river" (10-15). The scene is completed with an image of ideal union, as the

... drooping chestnut-buds began
To spread into the perfect fan,
Above the teeming ground. (16-18)

The knight and his Queen now appear with Guinevere, who "seemed a part of joyous Spring" (23), central to the harmony. The allusion to a perfect union in the landscape may represent the Guinevere/Launcelot liaison:³ In the fantasy world of

³Citing "Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere" as an example, John Killham speculates that "at this time

the lost paradise, sexual love can be treated as part of the natural order, free from society's moral constraints. Indeed, Sir Launcelot's song, 'Life of the Life within my blood', is such an erotic celebration of passion, that Kemble requested Donne, "for the sake of [his] future clerical views and Alfred's and Sir L.'s character . . . that it be kept as quiet as possible" (quoted in *Poems* 505). However, the treatment of Guinevere in the 'Fragment' suggests a more complex relationship than the one urged in Launcelot's song.

In her "gown of grass-green silk" and "light-green tuft of plumes . . . / Closed in a golden ring" (24-27), Guinevere appears as some natural deity. As a kind of irresistible force, she surpasses the Queen of Faery (32-36). While Guinevere's association with the Spring can be found in Malory's "Knight of the Cart" episode (XIX iv 648-49), and the link with the fairy queen may be traced to T.C. Croker's *Fairy Legends* (1825), or Carlyle's "Essay on Goethe's Helena" (1828) (cited in *Poems* 504), the source of Guinevere's power—her enchanting beauty—springs from Tennyson's private vision:

She looked so lovely, as she swayed
     The rein with dainty finger-tips,
 A man had given all other bliss,
 And all his worldly wealth for this,
 To waste his whole heart in one kiss
     Upon her perfect lips.   (40-45)

Here the particular relationship with Launcelot merges into a more compelling and more dangerous attraction: Tennyson's own longing to lose himself—"to waste his whole heart"—in the all-absorbing power of beauty. The poet's first approach to the Arthurian legend, and his initial characterization of Guinevere are thus rooted in the private vision. Moreover, Tennyson uses the same images and associations in

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Tennyson was attracted to stories concerned with sexual love, but confined his poems based on them to highly-charged description" (*Tennyson and The Princess* 185).

his later portrayal of the Queen, but we shall see that with the development from private to social vision, the Guinevere of the *Idylls* is strikingly transformed—from mythic creature to suffering human being.

With the first of his Arthurian works, then, Tennyson is still very much engaged in an escape to a fantasy world, and the Guinevere/Lancelot love relationship is part of the fantasy. In "The Lady of Shalott", emotional reality invades the life of the imagination, beginning the movement out of isolation.

The Lady of Shalott, imbowered in her island-retreat, is surrounded by life and activity, yet secluded from it. The mysterious curse prohibiting contact with the outside world recalls the daughters of Hesperus: as they must weave a magic incantation to protect their treasured isolation, so must the Lady weave her magic web. Confined to interpreting a reflected reality, the "shadows of the world" (ii 48) which appear in her mirror, she is absorbed in her art, "little other care hath she," (ii 44), until reality in the form of emotional response disturbs her artistic detachment.

The impact of the disturbance is vividly expressed in Part III, with the sudden intrusion of movement, sound, and colour into the shadows and silence of "still Shalott". Images of metallic hardness and burning/blinding power in the description of Lancelot's armour convey the violent effect of the emotional shock.

The Lady's death suggests that emotional experience must end artistic detachment, that the movement out of isolation into involvement can be fatal for the artist. Flavia Alaya, interpreting the death "in its mythical sense as an initiation into a new creative life" (283), believes that the conflict is not one of 'art v. reality'. Alaya argues that in "Shalott", Tennyson is distinguishing between two types of artistic disposition: between an attitude towards art that is "self-oriented and self-indulgent", and one that is permeated with "humanistic values" (278). Art which is

debased to "an incommunicable mystery", which is not linked to universal human experience and so can not be judged by "ordinary mortals" (278), but remains the exclusive privilege of a cult is ultimately life-denying. According to Alaya, Tennyson's revision of the poem's conclusion, from the Lady's "anxious appeal" (1832) to Lancelot's response (1842), shows that the poet wishes to focus on the impact of her act on others (286). Alaya thus reads the Lady's choice as a "renunciation of egoism" (286) which ends, not on death, but in regeneration.

Alaya's interpretation of "The Lady of Shalott" leads us to consider the first stage of this important transition in Tennyson's poetic development. The early emotional stress which made the escape into beauty so attractive was succeeded by other equally intense pressures. After the troubled atmosphere of Somersby, the young poet found vital support at Cambridge in his extraordinary friendship with Arthur Hallam, and in the general comradeship of the Apostles.⁴ The group's enthusiastic recognition of his talent, led by Hallam, was infused with an exalted conception of the poet's function in society. Inspired by the revolutionary vision put forth in Wordsworth's "Preface" to the second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*, and Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry* (Pitt 51), the Apostles formed their view of the poet's social responsibility in the new spirit of earnestness which was to mark the Victorian attitude towards art. An art which appealed to the senses rather than enlarging the reader's human sympathy and understanding was regarded as subversive. Tennyson's powers, his friends insisted, were too great to be wasted in the creation of a beautiful, but essentially private art. He was warned against indulging in the subjective excesses of Keats and Shelley, and urged to base his work on "objective foundations, common to all men" (Trench quoted in Joseph 57).

⁴Guided by Frederick Denison Maurice and John Sterling, the Apostles met regularly for serious discussion of religious, philosophical, and political issues. At the time of Tennyson's and Hallam's membership (1829-30), "the wise society" included James Spedding, John Kemble, Richard Chenevix Trench, and Richard Monckton Milnes (Martin 86-89).

Tennyson's response, directed to Richard Trench with "The Palace of Art", was to retreat still farther into beauty. Immersed in his "intense untold delight, / In deep or vivid colour, smell and sound," (*Poems* 412), the construction and enjoyment of his soul's "lordly pleasure-house" occupies two-thirds of the poem. Nevertheless, Tennyson was beginning to perceive the dangers of withdrawal, to realize that while the escape into beauty could lead to the source of imaginative power, isolation could eventually destroy it. In the final third of the poem, the stillness associated with creativity becomes a state of spiritual paralysis, most effectively rendered, again through the perfect fusion of landscape and mood:

A spot of dull stagnation, without light
     Or power of movement, seemed my soul,
 'Mid onward-sloping motions infinite
     Making for one sure goal.

A still salt pool, locked in with bars of sand,
     Left on the shore; that hears all night
 The plunging seas draw backward from the land
     Their moon-led waters white.   (245-52)

"The Palace of Art" and "The Lady of Shalott", written within a two-month period, show Tennyson treating opposite sides of the artistic isolation problem, and in both, he is more concerned with the problem than with any solution. The pleasure of "God-like isolation" may be seen as a form of pride, most dangerous to the spiritual health of the artist, for such deliberate seclusion from human contact can lead to creative paralysis. Art, then, must be rooted in involvement, but the effect of emotional connection can be devastating. The affirmation of the need for contact with which Tennyson concludes "The Palace of Art", seems almost perfunctory: the poet's interest and energy in the poem are devoted to imaginative and psychological experience. Similarly, although we may interpret the Lady's death in "this tale of magic 'symbolism'" as a rebirth into a new creative life, "Shalott's" "deep human

significance" (*Memoir* 1: 116) stresses the emotional wound, the association of love and death, which connects it to the *Idylls of the King*.

"The Lady of Shalott" looks forward to the fate of "Elaine" in the 1859 *Idylls*. The situations of the two are remarkably similar: both are secluded from the world, living in fantasy, both are destroyed by emotional response. Tennyson, however, denies knowing of Malory's "Fair Maid of Astolat", on which the later work is based, at this time, claiming his source as "an Italian novelette, *Donna di Scalotta*", and adding that "the web, mirror, island, etc. were [his] own" (quoted in *Poems* 354). The innovations reflect Tennyson's preoccupation with the position of the artist at this point; in "Shalott", Camelot simply provides a context for dealing with the question of aesthetic detachment. In his next, and first major Arthurian work, the poet's engagement with the material deepens: myth and experience coalesce in the "Morte d'Arthur".

Tennyson may not have been familiar with, or may have forgotten Malory's Elaine when composing "The Lady of Shalott", but his first reading of Malory left an enduring image of King Arthur (*Memoir* 2: 128). Captivated as a boy by the account of the leader who succeeded in imposing order on a lawless realm by establishing the code of chivalry, Tennyson was to recognize the same heroic potential in Arthur Hallam. Under the shock of Hallam's death (at the age of 22, 15 September, 1833), he returned to this image to create his personal myth of Arthur.

With the loss of Hallam, Tennyson's youthful longing for an irrecoverable past became tragically focused. In Malory's "The Day of Destiny" (XXI iv 707-17), he found the material best suited to express his immediate grief, and at the same time crystallized his archetypal vision of the lost Arthurian paradise:

... I think that we
 Shall never more, at any future time,
 Delight our souls with talk of knightly deeds,
 Walking about the gardens and the halls
 Of Camelot, as in the days that were. ("Morte d'Arthur" 17-21)

Tennyson follows Malory's text closely in the "Morte d'Arthur", making only changes which are consonant with the private vision. For example, he dwells on the beauty of Excalibur, elaborating on Malory's description of "that noble swerde, and the pomell and the hauffte was all precious stonys" (XXI iv 715), with characteristic attention to physical detail, so that the play of light on the jewels gives a dazzling effect which makes Bedivere's disobedience more credible:

There drew he forth the brand Excalibur,
 And o'er him, drawing it, the winter moon,
 Brightening the skirts of a long cloud, ran forth
 And sparkled keen with frost against the hilt:
 For all the haft twinkled with diamond sparks,
 Myriads of topaz-lights, and jacinth-work
 Of subtlest jewellery. (52-58)

Another major change, moving the time of Arthur's death from summer to winter, works most effectively. Whether or not the time is drawn, as Paden remarks, from G.S. Faber's account of Helio-Arkite mythology (cited in *Poems* 585), Tennyson's own desolate wasteland makes a fitting scene for the tragedy. Setting and mood are integrated to form the 'emotional' landscape of the "Morte", which appears, for example, in a passage expanded from Malory, as Bedivere, the last of Arthur's knights, strides "Larger than human on the frozen hills" (183), bearing his king to the marge. The harsh features of the landscape convey the knight's mental and physical distress, which is suddenly relieved with the sight of the lake:

... His own thought drove him, like a goad.
 Dry clashed his harness in the icy caves
 And barren chasms, and all to left and right

The bare black cliff clanged round him, as he based
 His feet on juts of slippery crag that rang
 Sharp-smitten with the dint of armed heels—
 And on a sudden, lo! the level lake,
 And the long glories of the winter moon. (185-92)

As the first of the early Arthurian works to be so closely based on a specific source, the "Morte" shows the poet enlarging and adapting the material to develop his private vision of the Arthurian legend. The 'emotional' landscape, rooted in profound personal loss, will later mark the *Idylls*. In addition, his choice of a winter setting for the tragic conclusion suggests that Tennyson may already have been planning the larger *opus* in terms of the natural cycle. Yet most important for the *Idylls*, which will incorporate Tennyson's social vision, is the identification of the king with Arthur Hallam.

Composed soon after Hallam's death, the first draft of the "Morte" appears in manuscript between "the first written sections of *In Memoriam*" (*Memoir* 1: 109). Moreover, as Tennyson continued to work over the next 15 years on the collection of lyrics which would make up *In Memoriam*, he drew from the portrait of Hallam, his conception of the noble leader who would appear in the 1859 *Idylls*.

Hallam, a young man of considerable intellectual accomplishment, warmly admired for his "wonderful mind and knowledge on all subjects, . . . [and] most tender, affectionate disposition" (Alford quoted in *Memoir* 1: 107), was regarded by his friends as a natural leader. Gladstone, Tennyson's nearest rival for Hallam's friendship, expresses the general view that the man was destined by his unique abilities to carry out a prominent public role: "When much time has elapsed, when most bereavements will be forgotten, he will still be remembered, and his place, I fear, will be felt to be still vacant, singularly as his mind was calculated by its native tendencies to work powerfully and for good, in an age full of import to the

nature and destinies of man" (quoted in *Memoir* 1: 108).

Tennyson, likewise, concentrates on Hallam's leadership qualities in his own tribute. Sections cix through cxiii of *In Memoriam* present an idealized portrait of the friend who will serve as the model for the Arthur of the *Idylls*.

His fitness as a leader is evident in Hallam's effect on others: he draws loyal hearts, strengthens the weak, subdues the proud and treacherous (cx 1-10). Indeed, Hallam possesses the very essence of leadership, a quality most admired by Tennyson, the capacity to create order out of chaos:

Large elements in order brought,
And tracts of calm from tempest made,
And world-wide fluctuation swayed
In vassal tides that followed thought. (cxii 13-16)

With his ability to take control, to influence minds, and hence, events, Hallam was perfectly suited for "A life in civic action warm," as "A potent voice of Parliament," (cxiii 9, 11), in the difficult age of transition which Tennyson, too, saw as "full of import to the nature and destinies of man". Hallam would have been "A pillar steadfast in the storm," of disorder—of the "thousand shocks . . . agonies, . . . and overthrowings"—which Tennyson feared would follow, "Should licensed boldness gather force," to produce radical political and social change (cxiii 12-20).

The legendary Arthur, who was similarly distinguished, in a remote era of social upheaval, by his ability to create civilization out of chaos, accordingly becomes identified with the idealized Arthur Hallam. Tennyson invests Malory's king with his friend's "High nature, amorous of the good," (cix 9), and Hallam's "noble manners, . . . the flower / And native growth of noble mind" (cxi 15-16), match Guinevere's description of the King:

. . . the most nobly-mannered [man] of all;
For manners are not idle, but the fruit
Of loyal nature and of noble mind. (G 332-34)

Moreover, Hallam's "manhood fused with female grace" (cix 17), a quality which Tennyson also associates with the character of Christ, "that union of man and woman, sweetness and strength" (*Memoir* 2: 69), becomes the ideal of Arthur's court: "that gentleness, / Which, when it weds with manhood, makes a man" (*GE* 866-67).

The noble character of the King, thus realized in the *Idylls*, is, however, only sketched in the original "Morte d'Arthur". Yet the medieval king transformed into "a modern gentleman / Of stateliest port" does appear in a frame entitled "The Epic" (294-95). Written a few years after the "Morte" (probably 1837-38), this frame did not accompany the trial-edition of the poem, but was published with it in 1842.

"The Epic" is itself noteworthy because it suggests Tennyson's plans for a more ambitious Arthurian project, and indicates his increasing concern to locate his art within a social context, a concern that is especially evident in the *English Idylls* of 1842.

The poet's Arthurian "Epic" is introduced at Francis Allen's Christmas Eve gathering, as a diversion from Parson Holmes' "harping . . . / Upon the general decay of faith" and want of an "anchor . . . / To hold by" (15-21). Everard Hall, whom we recognize as Tennyson from the description of his reading style (50-51), claims to have burned his twelve books of King Arthur, as "faint Homeric echoes, nothing-worth," (39), anticipating critical rejection of "the style of those heroic times" (35). The eleventh book, however, survives, rescued from the fire by the host "as a sugar-plum for Holmes" (43). In the conclusion which follows Hall's 'reading' of the "Morte d'Arthur", Tennyson points out the poem's contemporary relevance with his narrator's dream of Arthur returned, as "a modern gentleman", to serve as the much-needed "anchor" for this disjointed time.

The light, almost casual tone of the introductory section of "The Epic" and its positive closing contrast sharply with the solemn mood of the "Morte". Like the 'modern' "Prologue" and "Epilogue" with which Tennyson framed "The Day-Dream", "The Epic" provides "a reason for telling an old-world tale"⁵ (Fitzgerald quoted in *Memoir* 1: 189), for, as Kathleen Tillotson notes in "Tennyson's Serial Poem", the "Arthurian story was still strange to the ordinary reader" in 1842 (82). However, Tennyson's defensive anticipation of critical indifference to his hero, and the effort to assert his contemporary significance should also be considered in relation to the hostile reception of the 1832 *Poems*.

This volume, which had featured the early meditations on the imaginative escape into beauty, such as "The Hesperides", "The Lotos-Eaters", and "The Palace of Art", had not been well received. Tennyson's private vision, in fact, was widely regarded as "obscure" and "affected" (Charles Tennyson 135). The January, 1833 issue of the *New Monthly Magazine*, edited by Edward Bulwer (later Bulwer-Lytton), led the reaction, dismissing Tennyson as a member of the 'Cockney' school of Keats and Shelley, and predicting that "his muse [would] be wasted in affectation" (quoted in Martin 168). Next, John Wilson Croker, whose brutal review of "Endymion" 15 years earlier, was said to have led to the death of Keats, now determined to destroy his most promising follower (Martin 169). Croker's attack on Tennyson in the April, 1833 edition of the *Quarterly Review*, was deliberately malicious, but, nevertheless, not unrepresentative of the general direction of 19th century critical thought.⁶ Even

⁵ Ironically, John Sterling in an unsigned review of the *Poems*, 1842 (*Quarterly Review* September 1842), ignored "The Epic", but remarked on the irrelevance of the "Morte": "The miraculous legend of 'Excalibur' does not come very near to us, and as reproduced by any modern writer must be a mere ingenious exercise of fancy" (Sterling in Jump 119). Tennyson later claimed that Sterling's criticism discouraged him from going ahead with his planned Arthurian epic (Martin 266).

⁶ The general direction of 19th century critical thought indicated by the Apostles, was clearly articulated in Sir Henry Taylor's "Preface" to his poetic drama, *Philip van Artevelde* (1834). Rejecting the unintelligible beauty of the second-generation Romantics, Taylor insisted upon poetry's didactic function. The proper role of the poet, in Taylor's view, was "to thread the mazes of life in all its classes and under all its circumstances,

the more kindly disposed George Venables, a former Apostle, cautioned that the poems of the 1832 volume "were too imaginative and too largely imbued with the 'innermost magic', easily to excite popular interest, or to be read at once by those he specially wished to influence" (quoted in *Memoir* 1: 122).

Tennyson was acutely sensitive to criticism, and Croker's cruel attack, the most damaging of his career, left him with a profound horror of submitting his work to public judgement. The news that John Stuart Mill intended to re-evaluate his work favourably in the *London Review* provoked Tennyson's urgent protest to James Spedding, in February, 1835: "it is the last thing I wish for . . . I do not wish to be dragged forward again in any shape before the reading public at present . . ." (*Memoir* 1: 145). This reluctance to commit himself to print persisted, in spite of his friends' insistence on publication (Martin 245), over nearly ten years. Moreover, the years from 1833-42 were extremely difficult: this was a period of loss, frustration, and disappointment, of nervous illness and financial crisis, all of which left their mark on the poet's work.

Critical humiliation was followed, six months later, by the most devastating blow, the death of Arthur Hallam, that loss which would overshadow all other personal relationships for the rest of Tennyson's life. Then, in the period of recovery from the most overwhelming grief (1834-36), he became passionately attracted to, and subsequently disenchanted with Rosa Baring. His more serious and long-standing attachment to Emily Sellwood was formally recognized as an engagement in 1838, but broken off two years later due to the poet's unstable situation.⁷ Fi-

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common as well as romantic, and seeing all things, to infer and to instruct" (Taylor in Houghton and Stange 862).

⁷ Hallam Tennyson states that in 1840 "all correspondence between Alfred Tennyson and Emily Sellwood was forbidden" since the poet's financial status made marriage impossible (*Memoir* 1: 176). Robert Martin enlarges on the complex reasons for the break (247-49), citing the unhappy situation of Emily's sister Louisa, who was separated from her husband, Tennyson's elder brother, Charles Turner, on account of his opium addiction. Most important in the break, according to Martin, were Tennyson's own fears of hereditary

nancial difficulty figured in the disruption of both relationships, and money worries, added to the weight of family responsibilities, which since his father's death in 1831 had largely devolved upon the poet, exacerbated Tennyson's personal insecurity.

During this unsettled time, Tennyson's health deteriorated, and he began to suffer the bouts of nervous illness which eventually resulted in a breakdown. In fact, the state of the poet's emotional life from 1833 until 1848 might be compared with the condition of England at the same period, described by Carlyle in *Past and Present* (1843): "times here of half-frantic velocity of impetus, there of deadest looking stillness and paralysis" (18). Restlessly pursuing the 'vagabond' course of "A rolling stone of here and everywhere," ("Audley Court" 77), Tennyson was frequently on the move, often staying with such obliging friends as James Spedding and Edward Fitzgerald. Nevertheless, amidst all the disturbances and distractions, Tennyson continued to work steadily throughout this period, revising and completing poems begun in the early 30s, and composing new work. The results, published at last in the two-volume *Poems*, 1842, reveal the influence of critical and personal pressures, and mark another stage in his poetic development—offering both new versions of the pattern of escape, and a new emphasis on relationship in an expanding social vision.

The first volume presented works from 1832, substantially revised, including "Oenone", "The Palace of Art", "The Lady of Shalott", and "The Lotos-Eaters". "The Hesperides", which Croker had particularly savaged, was not reprinted, nor did it reappear until the publication of the *Memoir*. Revisions designed to eliminate signs of self-indulgent excess and affectation involved tightening the details in "The Palace of Art" and "The Lady of Shalott". In addition, a greater consciousness of the relationship of 'self' to 'other' in the individual's connection with society,

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mental instability (248). See also note 10.

appears in the revised conclusion to "Shalott", already noted, and strengthens the tension of "The Lotos-Eaters" with the addition of the mariners' recollection of "the memory of [their] wedded lives," (vi 114-32), and expansion of the final section (viii 150-73).

Volume II contained some of Tennyson's finest work, composed under the shock of Hallam's death: "Ulysses", "The Two Voices", "Break, break, break", and the "Morte d'Arthur". Representing the Arthurian line, along with the "Morte", were "Sir Galahad", written by September, 1834, and the earlier "Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere". The second volume also introduced the group of *English Idyls*, previously mentioned, which show Tennyson's determination to centre his art in the matter of ordinary daily life. These included, in addition to "The Epic" and "The Day-Dream", "The Gardener's Daughter", "The Miller's Daughter", "Dora", "Walking to the Mail", "Audley Court", and "Locksley Hall". Before examining the importance of the domestic element in Tennyson's evolving social vision, however, we shall consider another key aspect of his poetic development found in three of the 1842 works.

The pattern of escape takes a striking new form in "Ulysses", "Sir Galahad" and "Locksley Hall". Tennyson's mode of imaginative retreat now appears as an escape into action rather than contemplative withdrawal. Following Carlyle's espousal of work as the cure for the spiritual malaise which afflicted so many thoughtful individuals from the beginning of Victoria's reign, the art that urges some course of action—ideally, heroic—to counter the dread pull of psychic paralysis, seems more in accord with mainstream values than the selfish cultivation of beauty. Yet this form of escape, while apparently socially sanctioned, could be even more dangerous to the social order.

In "Ulysses", Tennyson adopts the mask of the aging hero to summon up some

sense of the need to go forward in order to free himself from the crippling effect of the loss of Hallam. Ulysses' refusal to "rest from travel" (6), to "rust unburnished," (23), confined to an existence of dull routine, has a rousing, exhilarating appeal, but the poem is by no means a straightforward rendering of the feeling that "life must be fought out to the end" (quoted in *Poems* 560).

Arthur D. Ward maintains that Tennyson's departure from his sources (Homer and Dante) are intended to show the reader that Ulysses deliberately distorts the past and is unable to face the present (315-16). More revealing, perhaps, is Ulysses' diction, which raises doubts concerning the 'heroic' nature of his enterprise. His energy has a desperate quality, his quest for experience is totally self-centred and ultimately self-destructive, as is implied, for example, in the description of his "desire / To follow knowledge like a sinking star, / Beyond the utmost bound of human thought" (31-32).

The strength of the poem, as always in Tennyson's best work, lies in its "characteristic ambiguity". Tennyson recognizes that the stability of society rests upon the steady fulfilment of individual responsibilities, so that Ulysses' abandonment of his authority and greedy pursuit of experience must undermine the social order. On the other hand, by presenting Ulysses' reference to Telemachus, the dutiful son who remains at home to carry out his father's work, in almost contemptuous terms (33-44), Tennyson is able to express his own ambivalent attitude to "the sphere / Of common duties," (39-40). Like the subversive charm of "The Lotos-Eaters", Ulysses' bold "purpose / To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths / Of all the western stars, until I die" (60-61), held for the grieving poet a potent attraction which would continue to temper his social vision.

The quest for the Grail, which Tennyson first treats in "Sir Galahad", offers another heroic escape into action, less complex than that of "Ulysses". As in the

earlier Arthurian fantasy, "Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere", Sir Galahad's eager pursuit of spiritual glory is depicted in concrete sensual detail, making his a most desirable retreat. However, the knight's adventure does not here appear to threaten the Arthurian realm as it will in the *Idylls*. In fact, Tennyson's later treatment of "The Holy Grail" (1869), recalls "Ulysses" rather than "Sir Galahad", as Arthur confronts the conflict between personal aspiration and social duty which Ulysses wilfully avoids.

The heroic advance into action is next given a contemporary setting in "Locksley Hall", one of the popular *English Idylls*. Springing from the poet's experience of love thwarted by material interests,⁸ the poem follows the course of a young man's emotional reaction to the loss of his love. Bitter anger against the system of "social wants" and "social lies" which he blames for his cousin's betrayal (59-62), leads him to consider the familiar escape to a tropical paradise, the "Summer isles of Eden" (164). At last, though, it seems that self-absorption yields to a sense of social responsibility, and he resolves to engage his energies in some purposeful endeavour. Treated with Tennyson's "characteristic ambiguity", however, the 'hero's' final glimpse of progress is undercut by his original distempered vision of a society "out of joint". Again, as in "Ulysses", the bold call to action, the courageous advance, may be another variation of imaginative retreat.

In "Locksley Hall" and later in *Maud* (1855), we recognize the archetypal 'pattern of conversion', which had been defined in Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* (1833). The sensitive youth, locked in a state of spiritual and/or emotional frustration,

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⁸ Although Tennyson insisted that "Locksley Hall" and its hero were "imaginary" (*Memoir* 1: 195), this poem and *Maud* were rooted in his background. Both Tennyson's older brothers were unhappy in their first loves: Frederick was refused by his cousin, Julia, and Charles prevented from making an unsuitable match with the family governess. Restrictions were also imposed upon Arthur Hallam's courtship of the poet's sister, Emily, and Tennyson's own interrupted engagement to Emily Sellwood provided further bitter personal experience. However, the principal source for both "Locksley Hall" and *Maud* was Tennyson's frustrated passion for Rosa Baring, as Ralph Wilson Rader demonstrates in *Tennyson's Maud: The Biographical Genesis*.

seeks escape in oblivion, but will only find release through 'work': he "must mix [himself] with action, lest [he] wither by despair" ("Locksley Hall" 98). By directing the energies outward, the painful consciousness of self is alleviated: action is the cure for the 'modern' malaise of introspection.

The *ennui* suffered by Carlyle's Teufelsdröckh gained wider hold as the century advanced and traditional beliefs were continually challenged by the inexorable progress of scientific knowledge. Lyell's *Principles of Geology*, which Tennyson read in 1837, and Chambers' *Vestiges of Creation*, published in 1844, for example, contained disturbing implications for religious thought, which are confronted in some of the most familiar sections of *In Memoriam* (LIV-LVI), and also in *Maud* (IV, vi). New conceptions of time and space raised fundamental questions about man's position in the universe. Formerly secure in his place as the first of species, man now faced the horror of becoming the last, as the forces of Nature, no longer necessarily controlled by a benevolent Creator, took on a new and terrifying character. In this time of uncertainty and declining faith, moreover, the prospect of change in the social order, signalled by the passage of the Reform Bill of 1832, and made inevitable by industrial and economic developments, increased the general sense of dislocation and anxiety. The gradual disintegration of the traditional value system left reflective individuals bewildered and apprehensive, robbed of will, often powerless to act. By 1856, Arnold would identify "depression and *ennui*" as characteristics of many representative works of literature (cited in Houghton 64).

In an atmosphere of confusion and fear, for many the sense of isolation was unendurable. Summing up the experience in *Past and Present* (1843), Carlyle declared, "Isolation is the sum-total of wretchedness to man" (264). In a "world alien, . . . all a hostile camp . . . not a home at all" (264), personal relationships assumed increasing importance. Accordingly, as part of the search for new ideals

and myths, we find in the literature of this transition age, an exaltation of woman, and new focus on marriage and the family as the central source of spiritual support. With woman appointed the guide to man's 'moral' nature, by mid-century the original 'pattern of conversion' was being modified by the addition of a new element: "the holy power of Love" (*Memoir* 1: 404).

The new interest in domestic life in a number of the 1842 *Poems* which was part of Tennyson's effort to connect his art with the common experience, anticipates his society's growing dependence on the home for spiritual comfort. The symbolic strength of the family is evident in the conclusion to "The Two Voices", where the sight of a family trio walking to church is powerful enough to restore the despondent narrator's will to live (409-23). Yet here the family is seen from the characteristic Tennysonian viewpoint—that of the outsider—for the poet's social vision was shaped first by his fundamental need for detachment and the family history of estrangement.

Tennyson's extended imaginative engagement with the position of the exile, the family member, alienated, or somehow excluded by circumstance from the warmth of the family circle, suggests how enviable—yet unattainable—the realization of an harmonious home life appeared to the poet. The germ of this attitude is contained in the mariners' perception of their return home as an intrusion, which was added to the 1842 edition of "The Lotos-Eaters" ("we should come like ghosts to trouble joy" vi 119). Much later, the same perception informs the tragic self-sacrifice of "Enoch Arden" (1864). In the *English Idyl*, "Dora", estrangement between father and son over the son's choice of a bride, leads to the son's banishment and death, although the family is finally reunited through the unselfish heroism of Dora and the son's widow. Also exiled from home is the nobleman who is the subject of discussion in "Walking to the Mail", another *English Idyl*. Landowner,

"Sir Edward Head", is driven overseas by his fear of the effects of the Reform Bill, marital discord, and an hereditary mental disorder.

On the other hand, at the same time that Tennyson was preoccupied with alienation and separation within the family, estrangement of lovers, and the material obstacles to marriage, his imagination was equally compelled by the 'ideal' nature of the marital relationship. Marriage, as a symbol of 'perfect' union, could reconcile spiritual ideal and emotional reality, which for Tennyson, seemed to be perpetually opposed. Moreover, the poet's conception of marriage and the role of woman, suggested in "The Gardener's Daughter" and "The Miller's Daughter", and developed in *The Princess*, both reflects and transcends the conventions of his time. Most importantly, his treatment of male/female relations in his evolving social vision is central to our understanding of 'The True and the False' *Idylls*.

In the idyllic union presented in "The Gardener's Daughter", marriage represents the resolution of the conflicting demands of life versus art. Composed just after "Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere" was completed (1833-34), "The Gardener's Daughter" displays the same connection of landscape and love: the erotic mood is mirrored and extended through the lush natural beauty of the setting. As in the Arthurian poem, perfect love is associated with the lost paradise, and the artist/narrator's recollection of his first vision of his love, "a Rose / In roses, mingled with her fragrant toil," (141-42), evokes echoes of Milton's Eve (*Paradise Lost* ix 432 cited in *Poems* 515). This, however, is a domestic "Eden", as is made clear by the description of its location:

Not wholly in the busy world, nor quite
Beyond it, blooms the garden that I love.
News from the humming city comes to it
In sound of funeral or of marriage bells;
And, sitting muffled in dark leaves, you hear
The windy clanging of the minster clock;

Although between it and the garden lies
 A league of grass, washed by a slow broad stream,
 That, stirred with languid pulses of the oar,
 Waves all its lazy lilies, and creeps on,
 Barge-laden, to three arches of a bridge
 Crowned with the minster-towers. (33-44)

This passage, in fact, may be read as a description of Tennyson's conception of the new source of imaginative power for his evolving social vision. He sees himself (the artist) as still removed from the distractions of social life, still centred in tranquil isolation, but now also connected with and drawing from common human experience, rather than withdrawing completely into fantasy.

The final image of the lovers' union (254-57), described, as Michael Timko notes, in "cosmic" terms (14), shows the artist vitalized, rather than destroyed by his emotional life. Here emotional connection leads to artistic realisation. Moreover, just as the artist's portrait of his love—the picture within the word-picture—can capture and transcend evanescent earthly beauty, so the personal relationship seems here to have eternal value—to withstand time and mortality.

With the affirmation of love in "The Gardener's Daughter", we see the genesis of Tennyson's myth of "the holy power of Love". Love is again treated as a "purifying, strengthening, sustaining power" which "allies itself with conscience and reason, and braces instead of debilitating the will" (Brimley quoted in Houghton 379), in "The Miller's Daughter", as the narrator recalls the impact of his emotional awakening:

But ere I saw your eyes, my love,
 I had no motion of my own.
 For scarce my life with fancy played
 Before I dreamed that pleasant dream—
 Still hither thither idly swayed
 Like those long mosses in the stream. (43-48)

Love, "that pleasant dream", is the ideal which invests life with meaning and direction: and woman thus becomes the agent of man's self-realisation. This view of male/female relations, in which the male seems unfocused, or somehow incomplete until he finds purpose in life through marriage, is further explored in *The Princess*. A 'modern' fairy tale, *The Princess* shows sexual confusion and psychological instability resolved in a perfect union, offering marriage as the means to ordering the emotional life, and hence to ordering society, a concept essential for the 1859 *Idylls*.

Tennyson worked on *The Princess* for over a decade, discussing its plan with Emily Sellwood in 1839 (*Memoir* 1: 248), publishing it first in 1847, and making major additions to the third (1850) and fourth (1851) editions.⁹ As 'A Medley', in which private vision merges into social, *The Princess* contains some of the poet's most beautiful blank verse lyrics. Again, a contemporary frame serves as introduction and conclusion to the romance, allowing Tennyson greater freedom to examine social issues within the fantasy, since "maybe wildest dreams / Are but the needful preludes of the truth" ("Conclusion" 73-74).

In *The Princess*, Tennyson resumes his preoccupation with the obstacles to marriage, but here the problems are caused by psychological rather than material pressures.¹⁰ These lovers, pledged to each other at the age of eight, are estranged when the Princess's personal aspiration results in her enforced detachment from society. The Prince who seeks to win her back from this self-imposed exile, is himself emotionally immature. In fact, both hero and heroine lack balance, and

⁹ Only minor stylistic amendments appeared in the second edition (1848), but in the third (1850), Tennyson inserted six Songs between the sections of the poem to make clear the connecting role of the child. Principal changes to the 1851 edition concerned the Prince's "weird seizures", q.v. note following.

¹⁰ As in "Locksley Hall", Tennyson's treatment here of the psychological barriers to marriage is rooted in personal experience. The 1851 additions, stressing the hereditary nature of the Prince's "weird seizures", suggest Tennyson's own fear of "a morbid devil in his blood", which was probably partly responsible for his reluctance to marry.

Tennyson sees the psychological development of each as equally important to the ultimate achievement of their "true marriage".

Tennyson displays remarkable insight into and sympathy for the constricted existence of the dependent Victorian female, as his Princess Ida struggles for self-realisation. Believing that knowledge is the key to growth and independence, so that "with equal husbandry / The woman were an equal to the man" (i 129-30), the Princess has established a college for young women, strictly excluding their male oppressors. Yet, in her ambition to "lose the child, assume / The woman" (i 136-37), the Princess has become cold and inflexible, like the zealot, Lady Blanche. Although surrounded by her devoted followers, Ida, "crammed with erring pride," (iii 86), like the soul in "The Palace of Art", has wilfully cut herself off from vital emotional contact, a course which can only lead to stagnation.

In his exploration of the complex questions of sexual roles, Tennyson deliberately sets up polarities, employing the technique which he will use again in the 1859 *Idylls*, of bringing opposites into focus in order to consider what is manly, what is womanly. Traditional beliefs are juxtaposed with radical new approaches: the extraordinary vision of the future in which woman's full potential will be realised, expressed by Lady Psyche (ii 154-64), is countered by the reactionary views of the Prince's father (v 147-50). Seeking to re-define masculinity and femininity, Tennyson characterizes men and women in terms of their strength or weakness in order to illuminate the positive and negative aspects of these qualities in the hero and heroine. The Prince's sensitivity, for example, is shown in contrast to his father's crude domination, and Gama's too yielding disposition. In addition, his emotional and imaginative nature is set off by the even temper of Florian, his "half-self", and by Cyril's solid practicality. Similarly, the Princess's iron will is brought into focus by comparisons with her counsellors, Blanche and Psyche, and with the ideal of

maternal tenderness, the Prince's mother.

When conventional attitudes, such as those expressed by the Prince's father, clash with the steely idealism of the Princess, violent conflict erupts. Destruction, though, initiates renewal, as the sanctuary, invaded by the wounded, is transformed into a hospital, and balance restored by the healing power of love. Ida assumes the role of nurse, and, in rescuing the Prince from a death-like trance, is finally freed from the false ideals and "false self" which have separated them (vii 136-49). Furthermore, "this truthful change" in the Princess ends the "haunting sense of hollow shows" which has plagued the Prince (vii 327-29).

Tennyson's resolution of the questions he has raised concerning male/female relations, offered in the Prince's glorious prospect of the future (vii 242-80), is a revision of Psyche's. While the poet clearly sympathizes with the Princess's noble quest for independence, he also perceives that social order may be threatened by such aspiration. Tennyson, then, proposes a revised conception of equality which, he believes, will not only ensure stability, but also promote growth and development. Recognizing that "woman is not undevelop't man, / But diverse", Tennyson envisions the new male/female relationship as one of "perfect music unto noble words;" with woman acting as man's spiritual guide, to supply "sweetness and moral height", while man provides leadership and "mental breadth". The poet thus deliberately bases his vision of equality on accepted sexual stereotypes because he sees "true marriage" as the means of reconciling 'real' and 'ideal', of uniting 'shadow' and 'substance', of making the ideal live:

. . . . . in true marriage lies
 Nor equal, nor unequal: each fulfils
 Defect in each, and always thought in thought,
 Purpose in purpose, will in will, they grow,
 The single pure and perfect animal,
 The two-celled heart beating, with one full stroke,
 Life. (vii 284-90)

This ideal union is at the heart of Tennyson's social vision. "True marriage" brings emotional security, gives form and direction to the individual life, and ultimately works for social stability, by fostering the essential sense of human connection. Through the marriage bond, the individual is linked, not only within a particular relationship, but also to his kind (Fredeman 376). Indeed, for Tennyson, "the importance of the domestic affections in shaping and ordering civilization" (Hair 52) is such that marriage becomes instrumental to the purposeful evolution of society. The "true marriage" of the Prince and Princess is to restore "the statelier Eden . . . / Then springs the crowning race of humankind." (vii 277-79). Similarly, the epithalamion which concludes *In Memoriam* heralds the advance from another "true marriage" to "the crowning race" of which Arthur Hallam was "a noble type". Finally, this concept of marriage as the foundation for social order and progress forms the ideal upon which Tennyson's Arthurian kingdom will be constructed. However, while both *The Princess* and *In Memoriam* end with a celebration of marriage, 'The True and the False' *Idylls* begin with the failure of the ideal, focusing on the failure of married love, and its consequences for society.

After the publication of *The Princess*, Tennyson turned with renewed interest to his Arthurian project. In 1848 he toured Cornwall, planning to take up the epic, which he claimed had been halted by John Sterling's objections to the "Morte" in his 1842 review (see note 5). Yet it was not until 1854 that Tennyson actually resumed work on the Arthurian material. The remarkable events of 1850—his marriage, the

huge critical and popular success of *In Memoriam*, and the supreme honour of the Laureateship—signalled the end of the extended period of mourning, ill health, and restless wandering. Happily, the emotional effect of his own marriage seems to have corresponded with the imaginative ideal, for “the peace of God came into [his] life before the altar” (*Memoir* 1: 329). An improved financial position made possible the establishment of the home at Farringford (1853), where the domestic routine was organized around the poet’s needs. Then, with the necessary conditions for creativity now admirably arranged by his wife, Tennyson was free to return to the subject which “perpetually haunted him” (*Memoir* 2: 125).

In the course of reviewing Tennyson’s poetic development thus far, we have observed his creative engagement with three myths which were to shape the *Idylls of the King*. His original interest in the Arthurian realm stemmed from a fascination with the ‘lost paradise’. Inclined by temperament to yearn for escape to an irrecoverable past, the poet’s imagination was compelled by a vision of the splendid, but doomed world of Camelot, as is seen in the prose sketch of “the sacred Mount”. The enchanted landscape of his Arthurian kingdom is lyrically rendered in “Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere”. In “The Lady of Shalott”, Camelot shifts from the realm of fantasy to that of reality, but remains integral to the conflict explored in Tennyson’s early work, i.e., the artist’s need for detachment as against his need for emotional contact.

The loss of Hallam crystallized Tennyson’s conception of the lost Arthurian paradise, and strengthened his imaginative involvement with the material. First in the “Morte d’Arthur”, then through the composition of *In Memoriam*, Tennyson re-created his boyhood hero, investing the legendary figure with his friend’s noble character to produce a new myth of the king as “Ideal manhood closed in real man”.

The poet’s first attempt to suggest the Arthurian story’s contemporary rele-

vance, presented in the 'modern' frame, "The Epic", was not particularly successful. Nevertheless, Tennyson continued to seek a social context for his work, partly in response to pressures which had begun with the Apostles in the early 1830s. Mainstream critical thought demanded that the artist concern himself with the common experience, for art was regarded as a form of moral teaching, and the poet's duty was "to elevate and to instruct" (Nicolson 23).

The need to construct meaning through art became a personal as well as a critical imperative as the advance of scientific knowledge threatened traditional beliefs and values. For Tennyson, Hallam's death gave the questions of the time a fearful intensity. Forced to confront the possibility of a meaningless, mechanistic universe, indifferent, or even hostile to man, Tennyson, like many of his contemporaries, resolved to find spiritual support in human relationships. Although the desire to escape his emotional pain, to retreat into fantasy, grief, or adventure, remained strong, Tennyson clearly perceived the dangers of such withdrawal, for both the individual and the social order. In the myth of "the holy power of Love", the poet sought to restore the vital sense of connection, offering marriage as the ideal source of stability and energy for society.

With the development of this domestic/social vision, Tennyson fixed upon his approach for an extended treatment of the Arthurian legend. Having imagined Camelot as 'lost' from the beginning, Tennyson would now interpret its fall in human terms. Reflecting the popular mythology, Tennyson's social vision would bring to the medieval material the "spirit of modern thought and . . . ethical significance" (*Memoir* 2: 122) required of the Victorian artist. At the same time, while viewing the disintegration of the Arthurian civilization as a breakdown of essential social bonds, Tennyson's primary interest remained with the emotional experience of the characters. Thus, as we shall observe in the discussion that follows, patterns

characteristic of the poet's 'private' vision would inform his treatment of the 1859
Idylls.

CHAPTER TWO

The True and the False;

Four Idylls of the King

Tennyson's Arthurian quest continued to be episodic in nature. Composed in three stages, over a period of 20 years (1856-75), the final version of the *Idylls of the King* did not appear until after the publication of the last idyll written, "Balin and Balan" in 1885.¹ Moreover, the serial process of composition and publication has led some commentators to disregard the structural unity of the *Idylls*. Yet J.M. Gray, describing the poem's cyclic design in *Thro' the Vision of the Night*, claims that Tennyson had determined the shape of the entire work by 1856 (5). According to Gray, Tennyson controlled the development of the poem throughout its "serial evolution", skilfully interweaving themes, characters, and images to execute his conscious design (5).—

Gray's study points to the central importance of the 1859 *Idylls* in the structure of the completed work. Having defined his approach to the material over the course of his extended imaginative involvement, Tennyson was prepared by 1856, as Gray notes, to begin precisely at the mid-point of his *opus* (3), focusing on a pivotal moment in the Arthurian realm's decline. Through the fatal paralysis of will presented in "Vivien", Tennyson establishes both the ideal foundation of Arthur's Order and the source of its disintegration. With the next three idylls, "Enid" (1856-

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¹ The first group of *Idylls*, published in 1859, comprised "Vivien", "Enid", "Guinevere", and "Elaine", all written between 1856-59. The second stage of composition began almost ten years later, with the writing of "The Holy Grail" (1868). After the publication of *The Holy Grail and Other Poems* (1969), which included "The Coming of Arthur", "Pelleas and Ettarre", and "The Passing of Arthur" (expanded from the "Morte d'Arthur"), Tennyson continued to work on the Arthurian material for the next five years. During this final stage (1870-75), the poet made important revisions and additions to the first eight *Idylls*, and composed the epilogue, "To the Queen", and three more poems. "The Last Tournament" and "Gareth and Lynette" appeared together in an 1872 volume, but "Balin and Balan", the last idyll written, was not published until 1885. In 1886, with new titles for "Enid", which had been divided into two parts in 1873, the work was considered to be complete, although Tennyson added his final correction, "Ideal manhood closed in real man", to the epilogue in 1891.

57), "Guinevere" (1857-58), and "Elaine" (1858-59), the poet refines and expands the pattern introduced in "Vivien" to create a framework for his later additions.

In this chapter we will examine the 1859 *Idylls*, in order of their composition, showing how through Tennyson's treatment of structure, theme, character, and imagery, "every poem becomes interwoven with every other, constantly deepening and expanding their meaning as the work unfolds" (Gray 5).

Considered together, the 1859 *Idylls* form a remarkably unified group. In each one, Tennyson adapts and enlarges the source material in accordance with his imaginative re-casting of the Arthurian legend. Concentrating on the inner life of the characters, Tennyson transmutes emotional experience into wasteland quests with the masterful fusion of landscape and mood observed in his earliest poetry. Dreams and lyrics reveal thematic connections throughout, but the most dramatic device used to unify the 1859 *Idylls* is the 'true/false' framework. Tennyson's characteristic technique of bringing opposites into focus both operates within the individual poems and extends into the structure of the larger work. Moreover, his use of juxtaposition here is closely related to the poet's intention in the *Idylls*, and our interpretation of this element can either limit or illuminate our reading of the work. Accordingly, this structural feature will be analysed first, before each idyll is discussed individually.

We can readily understand why an early reviewer chose to treat the 1859 *Idylls* "as contrasted studies in feminine character" (cited in Tillotson 93). Tennyson had initially planned to publish the first two idylls composed as a set, and had printed a trial-edition under the title *Enid and Nimuë: the True and the False*, in 1857. A careless charge that the picture of the seductress, Nimuë, might "corrupt the young", caused him immediately to withdraw this edition, although he complained "that the truth and purity of the wife in the first poem [should] well have served as antidote to the untruth of the woman in the second" (quoted in Martin 422). The next two idylls, presenting portraits of "the sinful Queen" and "the lily maid of Astolat", balanced the original pair, and at the same time heightened the contrast. The healing power of 'true' love, as exemplified by the faithful wife, Enid, and stainless maid, Elaine, is opposed to the destructive power of Vivien, "the evil genius of the Round Table" (cited in *Poems* 1593), and of Guinevere, "that wicked one,

who broke / The vast design and purpose of the King" (G 663-64). Underscoring the juxtaposition, the title of this quartet was to have been *The True and the False: Four Idylls of the King*. Tennyson's decision to use the less specific *Idylls of the King* meant that these poems would be more easily integrated into the larger work he envisioned, but did not, as Kathleen Tillotson remarks, "imply a change of purpose" (91).²

Such deliberate polarization appears to conform with the Victorian archetypes of *femme fatale* and 'angel in the house', and may be seen to fit a narrow moral scheme which fixes the blame for the downfall of the Arthurian realm chiefly on Guinevere's infidelity. Indeed, critics from Swinburne to McSweeney have objected that the emphasis on Guinevere's sin in the 1859 *Idylls* reduces the Arthurian tragedy to a domestic melodrama. McSweeney claims that Tennyson's "treatment of moral virtue in [this] group seems rooted more in Victorian conventions and anxieties than in perennial questions . . ." (100).

Tennyson, certainly, read in the dissolution of Arthur's "fair Order of [the] Table Round, / . . . [which served] as model for the mighty world," (G 460-62), a warning for Victorian society. Mid-nineteenth century England was undergoing a perilous process of transition, in which man's place in the social and natural order was being questioned. In fact, the very nature of humanity was in doubt, as science proceeded to debase man to his material, or worse, his animal nature. For Tennyson, the achievement of Arthurian civilization—the establishment of order from the chaos of barbarism—rests upon fidelity to the vows. "Man's word is God in man", declares the King (CA 132), identifying that essential capacity which distinguishes man from beast. Inspired and united under Arthur's leadership, his knights drive back the heathen, clear the land, make the paths safe, and maintain the realm

²Sir Charles Tennyson suggests that the title was changed "probably because of the publication of a novel by the Honourable Lena Eden entitled *The False and the True*" (317).

"by noble deeds at one with noble vows" (*LT* 123). The godless hosts, the lawless bandits who threaten disorder, remain confined to the wasteland as long as Arthur's ideal thrives. Failure to maintain the vows, however, results in the disintegration of the Order: civilization is overtaken by the forces of Nature, as the realm reels back into beast.

Fearing such a fate for his own society, beset with the "cynical indifference, the intellectual selfishness, the sloth of will, the utilitarian materialism of a transition age" (*Memoir* 2: 129), the poet sought with his interpretation of the fall of Camelot, not to prescribe a strict moral code, but to show the need for the ideal.

Moreover, through his treatment of the 1859 *Idylls*, Tennyson makes it clear that the Arthurian realm is destroyed by internal rather than external forces. In their own wasteland quests, Merlin, Arthur's knights, and his Queen must confront the destructive qualities within themselves. Furthermore, the elements which undermine the Arthurian Order—pride, selfishness, greed, sensuality, and brutality—remain constant threats to both personal and social order. Thus the problems Tennyson addresses in these *Idylls* are of enduring concern, and we shall see that his treatment of them is rooted in profound personal understanding, as well as in his social vision.

Since the poet's own ideals corresponded with those of his time, his conception of the issues in the 1859 *Idylls* reflects mainstream Victorian values. As we have seen, Tennyson regarded "the marriage bond as the archetype and model for social relationship" (Pitt 181), and the breaking of this bond must have serious consequences for social order. The failure of the Arthur/Guinevere relationship is therefore central to Tennyson's treatment of the disintegration of the realm, as it represents the failure of relationship through the Order. Tennyson focuses, moreover, on Guinevere's infidelity, not because he sees it as the main cause of the

breakdown, but because it serves as a symbol for all the individual failures and betrayals which lead to the realm's decline.

Nevertheless, the polarization of the female characters in these *Idylls* tends to suggest that Tennyson sees the health of society as primarily a feminine responsibility. "This is all woman's grief", the little novice tells Guinevere, "That *she* is woman whose disloyal life / Hath wrought confusion in the Table Round" (*G* 216-18). On the other hand, the virtuous influence of the 'true' women has a healing effect: proof of Enid's fidelity apparently revives her wounded husband, and Elaine's careful nursing saves Lancelot from death.

The true/false antitheses, in fact, operate on several levels to reveal the complexity, rather than the simplicity of the poet's vision. First of all, they illustrate the inadequacies of human perception: the inability or unwillingness to "see" which Tennyson identifies as the primary source of the problems in the *Idylls* (*GE* 1-7). In addition, the true/false antitheses form part of the larger framework of polar opposites (Sense v. Soul, Nature v. Civilization, Discord v. Music, Real v. Ideal) which structures the *Idylls* throughout, illuminating what Martin Dodsworth calls the poet's "vision of the doubleness of things" (24). By setting up such deliberate contrasts, by emphasizing differences, Tennyson uncovers essential similarities, moving towards his conception of "a deeper but inexpressible unity to all things, a unity which nevertheless [does] not deny their fundamental distinct and individual existences" (Dodsworth 28). Thus Guinevere, set "betwixt her best / Enid, and lissome Vivien, of her court / The wiliest and the worst;" (*G* 27-29), emerges as fallible human being, rather than conventional 'fallen woman'.

Indeed, as we examine these *Idylls* in detail, we shall find that the poet's interest in the emotional life of his characters—male and female—raises them beyond Victorian stereotypes. He takes great care, for example, to establish the motivation

for Vivien's malice, and Elaine's "Song of Love and Death" reveals a disturbing quality to the lily maid's personality. Similarly, while the demonstration of Enid's loyalty is important to Geraint's restoration, the main interest in this idyll is in the knight's psychological development. Geraint must conquer his own fears of weakness, must resolve the division within, before he is able to perceive his wife's 'truth'. The individual must achieve personal order first, before he can achieve that successful union which serves as the model for social relationship.

The substance of Tennyson's 'message' in the 1859 *Idylls* concerns the direct connection between personal order and social order. No single act or individual is solely responsible for the collapse of the Round Table—neither Guinevere's disloyalty, nor Vivien's machinations can alone effect the breakdown—but the vitality of the Order does depend upon individual choices and decisions, "For man is man and master of his fate" (*MG* 355). Through individual acts of will, through individual responses to the vows, as demonstrated by Edyrn and Geraint, the Order is maintained. When the will is divided, as in Lancelot and Guinevere, or paralysed, as in Merlin, disaster must follow.

With "Vivien",³ the first of the 1859 *Idylls* composed, Tennyson identifies in Merlin's failure of will, "the little rift within the lute" (*MV* 388) which forms the structural and imaginative heart of his Arthurian *opus*. Returning in February, 1856, to the material which he had put aside in order to work on *Maud* (1854-55) (Charles Tennyson 282), the poet created from a minor incident in Malory (IV i 76-77), an episode central to the realm's decline. Rooted in his fascination with the mystery of the creative process which had generated much of his early work, Tennyson's treatment of the fall of Merlin introduces key patterns and themes which will be developed throughout the *Idylls of the King*.

³Originally entitled "Nimue" in 1857, published as "Vivien" in 1859, and given the final title, "Merlin and Vivien" in 1869.

This first vision of the Arthurian Order is presented from the characteristic Tennysonian viewpoint of recalling the irrecoverable past: Camelot is already open to corruption, the glory of the realm is seen in retrospect, and the ideal defined through its defeat.

Establishing the narrative structure for the next three idylls, Tennyson opens "Vivien" *in medias res*, then relates in flashback the events which have brought Merlin and his mistress to rest before the huge hollow oak, deep in the Breton forest. Oppressed by "a great melancholy", Merlin has left Camelot, to seek refuge "in the wild woods of Broceliande". He is pursued by "the wily Vivien", who, snubbed by Arthur and his court, has determined to gain power

Upon the great Enchanter of the Time
As fancying that her glory would be great
According to his greatness whom she quenched. (MV 214-16)

Their journey sets the pattern for the quests of Geraint and Lancelot, and the final flight of Guinevere. Each of these journeys to the wasteland constitutes a test of the individual.

The enchantment of Merlin at once recalls Tennyson's preoccupation with imaginative paralysis, the problem delineated in "The Palace of Art". In that early poem, the soul, out of pride, deliberately withdraws from human experience to find that the selfish contemplation of beauty leads to spiritual atrophy, the wasting of creative power. Merlin's retreat from society results in a similar state of death-in-life when, out of vanity, he allows himself to yield to Vivien, and ends bereft of his creative power, imprisoned "in the hollow oak . . . / And lost to life and use and name and Fame" (MV 967-68).

As we have seen, Tennyson was engaged from the beginning of his poetic development with the problem of nourishing the sources of imaginative power, and

Fred Kaplan believes that he was most concerned with "the failure of the imagination to sustain creativity" at the mid-point of his career (285). Moreover, Kaplan's analysis of "Merlin as Fallen Artist" suggests that Tennyson's treatment of the Merlin/Vivien relationship is deeply rooted in the poet's own imaginative experience—in his fascination for 'the dark side of the imagination'. Kaplan regards Vivien as a personification of the perverse, destructive aspect of the imagination, "its desire to embrace timelessness, death, and peace" which threatens to overwhelm Merlin/Tennyson the artist (285). Merlin fears Vivien, recognizing the danger that she represents (*MV* 300–02), yet is strongly attracted to her, just as Tennyson was drawn by the seductive charm of "~~The Lotos-Eaters~~". In surrendering his power to Vivien, Merlin, in effect, yields to that compelling desire to be absorbed into a state of perfect rest.

Vivien is, indeed, a powerful and mythic creature. Beautiful, cunning, and amoral, an adept manipulator of sexuality and slander, she is "clearly a type of the destructive female" (Slinn 8), whose origins may be traced to "the death wish of the imagination" (Kaplan 285). However, as Mr. Slinn observes in "Deception and Artifice in *Idylls of the King*", she must not be considered solely as 'a projection of the magician' or 'embodiment of Merlin's negative side' (8). Tennyson devoted great care to the characterization of Vivien, whom he developed from Malory's "Nimue" (Gray "Two Transcendental Ladies" 104) and the "Viviane" of the *Romance of Merlin* (Staines 27), with the intention that she should function as an independent and important figure in his Arthurian realm.

In a later addition to the original flashback section (lines 6–146, 1875), Tennyson humanizes Vivien, clarifying and strengthening her motivation. A child of Arthur's enemy, "born from death . . . / Among the dead" (*MV* 44–5), Vivien has been taught to despise the King and his Order by the villainous Mark, "he that

always bare in bitter grudge / The slights of Arthur and his Table," (MV 6,7). Acting on Mark's instruction, she has insinuated herself into Camelot, in an effort to corrupt "the monkish manhood". As she spies on Guinevere and Lancelot, the chief targets of her scorn and malice, Vivien's speech (MV 101-20) reveals her as almost pathetic—possessed of envy, incapable of love. At the same time, she is linked with that treacherous creature which destroys from within, the

... little rat that borest in the dyke
[His] hole by night to let the boundless deep
Down upon far-off cities . . . (MV 100-12)

Vivien's very human failings thus fuel a demonic purpose.

The role of *femme fatale* that Vivien is to assume becomes apparent in the portrait which begins with a lavish description of her sensual appeal:

There lay she all her length and kissed his feet,
As if in deepest reverence and in love,
A twist of gold was round her hair: a robe
Of samite without price, that more exprest
Than hid her, clung about her lissome limbs,
In colour like the satin-shining palm
On sallows in the windy gleams of March: (MV 217-23)

and goes on to identify her serpentine features,

And lissome Vivien, holding by his heel,
Writhed toward him, slid up his knee and sat,
Behind his ankle twined her hollow feet
Together, curved an arm about his neck,
Clung like a snake; . . . (MV 236-40)

The reptilian imagery, as David Staines points out in *Tennyson's Camelot* (27, 28), may have been drawn from the illustration of the opening of Southey's fourth book of *Malory*. In this illustration, "an enormous serpent winds itself around the ankle and across the knees of a naked man" to form an ornamental "S" (28). Tenny-

son, however, emphasizes Vivien's association with the serpent to create a mythic rather than decorative effect.

Like the archetypal tempter, Vivien's strength consists in her rhetorical skills, in her wilful distortion of the truth. The poet, moreover, treats her seduction of Merlin not merely as a sexual victory in the war of 'Sense against Soul', but as a complex battle of wits in which Vivien succeeds at last, by sheer persistence, in undermining the Arthurian ideal. Vivien gains the great Wizard's attention first by playing upon his vanity, flattering "his own wish in age for love" (*MV* 183). She then proceeds cleverly to pervert the Arthurian ideal of perfect trust, demanding that Merlin 'prove' his love by entrusting her with the magic charm which will allow her to control his fate. In the course of the struggle that follows, Tennyson defines the values of his Arthurian realm; focusing on the relationship of "use" to "name" and "fame".

In Merlin's recollection of his advice to a young knight we see the genesis of Tennyson's Arthurian code. The knight, Merlin recalls, had chosen for his shield the emblem of "an Eagle rising", symbolizing the pursuit of fame (*MV* 473). "Rather use than fame" (*MV* 478), is the appropriate motto for an Arthurian knight, who must, as Arthur will tell Gareth, do the deed "for the sake of . . . [his] King / And the deed's sake" (*GL* 558-59), rather than for personal glory. Fame may attend his accomplishments, but fame, Merlin explains is a "boon" only as it provides "ampler means to serve mankind" (*MV* 487). To be of "use", then, is the proper goal for a member of Arthur's Order. Thus the more fitting emblem for his shield is that of "a Gardener putting in a graff" (*MV* 477), representing his devotion to the work of cultivation which is essential to the support of the realm.

Questions of name and fame will be further explored in the *Idylls* to follow as Geraint fears, and Guinevere faces the loss of honour, while Lancelot agonizes over

the responsibilities his reputation confers. Merlin, however, "rather dread[s] the loss of use than fame;" (MV 517), and recognizing in Vivien the force that threatens to destroy his usefulness, resists her wiles, offering the history rather than the secret of the coveted charms.

The charm, Merlin tells Vivien, was first used by an Eastern ruler, whose wife was so beautiful that his kingdom became immobilized: "councils thinned, / And armies waned," (MV 570-71), under the potent influence of her "isle-nurtured eyes".⁴ In order to possess his Queen, the jealous husband sought out a mystic who taught him

. . . . . to charm the Queen
In such-wise, that no man could see her more,
Nor saw she save the King, who wrought the charm,
Coming and going, and she lay as dead,
And lost all use of life. . . . (MV 639-43)

This vision of the power she may yet wield inspires a renewal of Vivien's efforts. Having failed to learn the secret by craft and cunning, with her "tender rhyme" and "pretty sports", she next attempts to undermine the great Wizard's resolution with slanderous attacks upon the Order. Merlin refutes her allegations, but his defence is qualified with the knowledge of some deterioration in fidelity to the vows:

I know the Table Round, my friend of old;
All brave, and many generous, and some chaste. (MV 814-15)

He replies "sadly" to the report of Lancelot's "commerce with the Queen" (MV 768-71), providing a somewhat ambiguous explanation which introduces the problem of perception:

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⁴This legend, invented by the poet, both reminds us of his first portrait of Guinevere's enchanting beauty, and forecasts, as Donald Hair notes, the subversive effect she is to have on the Arthurian ideal of "use" (179).

Sir Lancelot went ambassador, at first,
 To fetch her, and she watched him from her walls.
 A rumour runs, she took him for the King,
 So fixt her fancy on him: let them be. (MV 772-75)

Vivien's attack upon the King, however, thoroughly enrages the Wizard, as she charges that by blinding himself and his Order to the Guinevere/Lancelot affair, Merlin has become "the main cause of their crime" (MV 786). Merlin's bitter response expands upon the limitations of human vision, which is a controlling theme of the 'True/False' *Idylls*. The noble King's idealistic vision would "Have all men true and leal, all women pure;" (MV 792), against the evidence of his own eyes. Vivien's judgment, on the other hand, is clouded by corruption. One of the crowd of "base interpreters", she delights in finding fault in "a name of note", for she would reduce all men to "an equal baseness", and denies their spiritual potential (MV 827-36).

Merlin's vision is clear, but although he perceives the harlot's 'false' purpose, he remains vulnerable to her attraction, and allows Vivien to turn his outrage to her own advantage. Feigning grave distress at his violent rejection of her, she achieves the desired result, as "he let his wisdom go / For ease of heart, and half believed her true" (MV 890-91). The storm which has been building since the beginning of the poem now breaks, and in "its burst of passion", Merlin yields at last, "overtalked and overworn" (MV 959-64). The idyll concludes with Vivien's triumphant shriek as she flees "the ravaged woodland", leaving the great Wizard locked in a state of death-in-life.

The first of the 1859 *Idylls* thus establishes the major concerns of the 'True/False' group. Inspired by his life-long interest in "the creator and the creative process" (Kaplan 285), Tennyson found in Merlin's failure of will the key to the Arthurian realm's decline. The enchantment of the great architect of Camelot threatens the

very "life and use" of Arthur's Order which depends upon the exercise of the individual will. Moreover, through the imaginative treatment of source material which distinguishes his characterization of Vivien, the poet exposes the dangers to the realm on both the social/ideological and personal/psychological levels.

Vivien's amorality stands as the polar opposite to the idealism of the King. A beautiful, dangerous creature of Nature, she is allied with those natural forces which threaten to overwhelm the Arthurian civilization. Merlin, himself, sees her in these terms, as a "wave about to break upon [him] / And sweep [him] from [his] hold upon the world" (*MV* 300-01). At the same time, on a deeper level, Vivien functions as a projection of Merlin's negative side, as that insidious inner voice which seeks to undermine his faith, and ultimately destroys his creative power by luring him into a state of paralysis.

With the completion of "Vivien" in late March, 1856, Tennyson immediately set to work on his next idyll, using the problem of paralysis of will as a starting point. In fact, the situation described at the opening of "Enid", the second idyll written, parallels that which concluded the first. Like the great magician, rendered impotent under his mistress's malevolent influence, "the brave Geraint", another powerful member of Arthur's court, is also "lost to life and use and name and fame" because of his obsessive love of his wife. Paralyzed by his own insecurities, Geraint has become

Forgetful of his promise to the King,
 Forgetful of the falcon and the hunt,
 Forgetful of the tilt and tournament,
 Forgetful of his glory and his name,
 Forgetful of his principedom and its cares. (*MG* 50-54)

Similarly, while Vivien had pursued Merlin to the Breton woods, seeking to possess his power by means of a perverted 'test' of his love, Geraint undertakes a

wasteland quest to 'prove' Enid's obedience and fidelity. Through the confrontation of his jealous doubts and fears of weakness, however, Geraint's confidence in his wife and in himself is restored and strengthened. Thus with "Enid", which was designed to precede "Vivien", Tennyson reverses the original pattern, concluding with an affirmation rather than defeat of the Arthurian ideal.

Proceeding with the narrative structure established in "Vivien", the poet opens "Enid" *in medias res*, with Geraint, already locked in a state of emotional paralysis, and soon to depart with his wife on their journey to the wasteland. The flashback section describing the earlier quest which had resulted in their marriage, was, however, full enough to constitute an idyll in itself. Accordingly, Tennyson divided the poem into two parts in 1873, and in 1886 entitled them "The Marriage of Geraint" and "Geraint and Enid".

Based on "Geraint, Son of Erbin", from Lady Charlotte Guest's translation of the Welsh romance, the *Mabinogion*, the two "Enid" idylls display the same creative approach to source material which marked Tennyson's treatment of "Vivien". While the poet essentially follows the events presented in the *Mabinogion*, his alterations and additions, particularly in the treatment of character and landscape, are designed to support and develop his expanding vision of the Arthurian realm.

A rumour "touching [Guinevere's] guilty love for Lancelot" (MG 25) infects Geraint with the fear of contamination, precipitating the action in "The Marriage of Geraint". Horrified lest his wife, "should suffer any taint / In nature" through her friendship with the Queen (MG 29-32), he removes Enid from the court, on the pretext of having to defend his territories. Yet there, the Prince's own reputation suffers, as he neglects his duties in his efforts to possess Enid entirely.

Tennyson invented both the rumour about the Queen and Geraint's reaction to emphasize the destructive effect of slander, a theme central to the *Idylls*. Later,

in "Balin and Balan", which follows "Geraint and Enid" in the final order of the work, the pernicious influence of slander on a vulnerable personality will end in tragedy. At this point, though, the rumour plays upon Geraint's weakness to create division between husband and wife.

Geraint's possessive "worship" only distresses Enid, as she hears his people complain that "his force / Is melted into mere effeminacy" (*MG* 106-07). Prevented by "bashful delicacy" from telling her husband of the slurs against him, however, Enid blames herself for his loss of reputation, fearing that she is "no true wife" (*MG* 108). "Fragments" of these words, overheard "by great mischance" (*MG* 112-13), aggravate Geraint's own fears, and he resolves that they must "ride forth into the wilderness", insisting, moreover, that Enid should wear her "worst and meanest dress" (*MG* 127-130). This strange command, recalling the "state / Of broken fortunes" in which Geraint first found her (*MG* 12-13) introduces the account of his original "journey to her" (*MG* 143).

An insult to the Queen provokes the initial quest. The pursuit of an unknown knight who has offended Guinevere leads the Prince to the ruined home of the Earl Yniol, who has been deposed by the same arrogant offender, his nephew. The gentle Enid, Yniol's daughter, wins Geraint's heart, and he vows to make her his wife. Fighting as Enid's champion, Geraint overthrows the "sparrow-hawk", whose name is revealed as "Edyrn", and dispatches him to crave the Queen's pardon. The Prince then returns to court with Enid, dressed in her "faded silk", so that Guinevere, as promised, may array her for their wedding.

Tennyson deliberately reverses the role of Yniol, from that of wrong-doer, responsible for his own misfortune, to that of passive victim (noted in *Poems* 1539). In addition, although the patient fortitude which Yniol displays appears commendable, his self-appraisal reflects upon Geraint's neglect of duty with which the idyll

began:

... I myself sometimes despise myself;
 For I have let men be, and have their way;
 Am much too gentle, have not used my power:
 Nor know I whether I be very base
 Or very manful, whether very wise
 Or very foolish; ... (MG 465-70)

Ironically, Vivien's scornful interpretation of the King—"Man! Is he man at all ...?" (MV 779)—echoes in the expression of Yniol's self-doubts, raising questions of what is 'manly' conduct? when does gentleness become weakness? The devastating consequences of his gentleness and lack of vigilance, moreover, can be seen in the description of the Earl's home:

Here stood a shattered archway plumed with fern;
 And here had fallen a great part of a tower,
 Whole, like a crag that tumbles from the cliff,
 And like a crag was gay with wilding flowers:
 And high above a piece of turret stair,
 Worn by the feet that now were silent, wound
 Bare to the sun, and monstrous ivy-stems
 Claspt the gray walls with hairy-fibred arms,
 And sucked the joining of the stones, and looked
 A knot, beneath, of snakes, aloft, a grove. (MG 316-25)

This ruined structure recalls the image of the oak, "so hollow, huge, and old / It looked a tower of ivied masonwork," (MV 3-4), in which Merlin remains imprisoned. In addition, as John Rosenberg remarks in *The Fall of Camelot* (77), Yniol's decaying castle "prefigures the wreckage of Camelot" which the knights will find on their return from the Grail quest. As well, this passage looks forward to the description of the hall of Pellam, the ascetic zealot who has abandoned matters of the world, allowing his stronghold to deteriorate into "A home of bats" (BB 328-31). Through these interwoven images which form the landscape of the *Idylls*, the poet continually reminds us of those natural forces which, if left untended and

unresisted, will inevitably overtake civilization.

At this stage in the Arthurian cycle, though, it appears that man may still be "master of his fate" (*MG* 355), as Tennyson offers the possibilities of repentance and renewal with his characterization of Edyrn, the nephew who has betrayed Yniol. Combining in a single figure both the nephew and arrogant "sparrow-hawk" knight of his source (noted in *Poems* 1540), Tennyson stresses Edyrn's overbearing pride. Refused as a suitor to Enid because of his "fierce and turbulent" character, Edyrn retaliates, out of injured pride, using slander and treachery to seize his uncle's estates (*MG* 447-59). However, when he has been humbled, his "proud self" overthrown by Geraint, Edyrn can begin the process of redemption, transforming "his old dark life" into one of noble purpose, which Tennyson deals with at length in the conclusion to "Geraint and Enid".

The *Maginogion* also supplies the details of Enid's costume which Tennyson works into the theme of appearance v. reality. The poet begins by building Enid's anxiety about her shabby apparel into a prophetic dream of the dangers ahead at "that strange bright and dreadful thing, a court," (*MG* 616). Then, her "faded silk" becomes the first test of Enid's love. Geraint asks her to travel to Caerleon dressed as he had found her, not just to fulfill his pledge to Guinevere, but so that he may assure himself of her love, banishing any suspicion that Enid has agreed to marry him out of some longing "for court / And all its perilous glories" (*MG* 803-04). This request points to the insecurity and readiness to judge by appearances which will lead the Prince to embark upon his "fatal quest / Of honour, where no honour can be gained" (*GE* 702-03). Although Geraint is reassured by Enid's external appearance, rejoicing "That never shadow of mistrust can cross / Between [them]" (*MG* 815-16), he has yet to recognize fully her pure, 'true' nature.

With "The Marriage of Geraint" accomplished, Tennyson now turns his at-

tention to the unhappy relationship of husband and wife, continuing to adapt and expand his source material to explore the emotional experience of "Geraint and Enid", and to illuminate theme. As the couple follow the "perilous paths" chosen for this test of his manhood and her fidelity, their meetings with a former suitor and new rival for Enid's love are designed to reflect upon their own troubled union. The poet, moreover, uses these encounters with the lords of the wilderness to define further the nature of the enemies to Arthur's order, as well as to reveal the destructive elements of Geraint's psyche.⁵

The first meeting occurs "in the heart of waste and wilderness" (*GE* 313). Geraint and Enid, exhausted by the day's adventures, which included the Prince's defeat of six "caitiff" knights, are resting in a state of mute misery (*GE* 264-69), when they are visited by Limours, "the wild lord of the place" (*GE* 277). Unaware that Limours was Enid's first suitor, rejected before Edyrn because of his dissolute character, Geraint welcomes "the sudden guest" and his companions, providing lavish refreshment for them (*GE* 283-89). Limours reciprocates by entertaining the Prince with jests, "free tales", and brilliant conversation. Then, given Geraint's permission to speak with his wife, "who sits apart", he urges Enid to forsake the husband who so neglects her, pleading with passion, "wine-heated from the feast" (*GE* 351).

Contrasting sharply with Geraint's inability to communicate with his wife, Limours' easy eloquence marks him as an enemy to Arthur's Order. His debasement of Arthurian 'courtesy' to an attitude of "pliant courtliness" and his freedom with language, as he "took the word and played with it, / And made it of two colours:" (*GE* 291-92), represent a most dangerous source of corruption. Limours, "A creature wholly given to brawls and wine," (*MG* 441), is the type of "slothful

⁵ Both J.M. Gray (*Thro' the Vision* 18-19), and Donald Hair (162-66), comment on how Tennyson adapts the figures of Limours and Doorm in order to dramatize Geraint's inner conflict.

officer³ whom the King will root out in his cleansing of the realm (*GE* 931-43).

Limours and Geraint are, nevertheless, linked in their love for Enid, and through Limours' dependence upon Enid, "the pilot star of [his] life", whose loss has turned him "wild" (*GE* 306-08). Tennyson suggests the unstable element in Geraint's personality. The "femininely fair" Earl reflects the weak, uxorious, "all-amorous" side of the Prince, who became besotted in his efforts to "keep [his wife] true" (*GE* 40). As Donald Hair comments, their host/guest relationship "indicates the extent to which Limours' effeminacy is a part of Geraint's character" (163).

Proceeding "from the territory of false Limours / towards the waste earldom of . . . Doorm" (*GE* 437-39), Geraint moves deeper into the wilderness. Prepared by Enid's warning, he repulses the attack of Limours and his followers, but, wounded in the combat, later collapses in this "realm of lawless turbulence" (*GE* 521). The loyal devotion which has sustained Enid through her trial thus far, now enables her to save her husband's life, for she courageously persuades Doorm to have Geraint carried to his hall. There the Prince, apparently unconscious, witnesses the strength of Enid's love, and at the same time, confronts and conquers the most destructive aspect of his own character, as personified by the Earl Doorm.

Tennyson stresses the bestiality of Doorm, "whom his shaking vassals called the Bull," (*GE* 439), and depicts the gross sensuality of the Earl and his band in the details of their crude feast:

And men brought in whole hogs and quarter beeves,
And all the hall was dim with steam of flesh:
And none spake word, but all sat down at once,
And ate with tumult in the naked hall,
Feeding like horses when you hear them feed: (*GE* 601-05)

Such a vile display certainly offers a savage contrast to the "manners so kind, yet stately" and "grace / Of tenderest courtesy" which prevail in Arthur's hall (*GE*

860-61). Indeed, the "wild ways of the lawless tribe" (*GE* 607) represent the very antithesis of the Arthurian code, as they devastate the land, living by violence and plunder.

The "brute Earl" rules his barbarous realm by force, 'compelling all creatures to his will' (*GE* 628). Determined to possess the gentle Enid in the same fashion, he issues three commands which recall Geraint's abrupt instructions to his wife—dictating her dress, forbidding her to speak—at the outset of their journey, and hence reveal Geraint's own capacity for brutal domination.

Enid, concerned only with restoring "her dear lord" to life, refuses to eat or drink, and her final refusal to change her "poor gown" for the Earl's "splendid silk", completes the test of her fidelity (*GE* 697-710). Exasperated by the woman's obstinate constancy, Doorm strikes Enid, and Geraint, released from his state of death-in-life by her cry, slays the Earl.

"Doorm's death", Donald Hair points out, "marks the moment of Geraint's rebirth" (166). Having conquered first the weak, effeminate aspect, and now the violent, domineering side of his nature, Geraint is finally free of the doubts and fears which have divided his will and alienated him from his wife. Tennyson makes it clear that the powerful influence of Enid's love plays a vital role in the Prince's recovery. Despite Geraint's imposition of silence, Enid's actions throughout their wasteland quest communicate her feelings, and help to energize his will at the critical point. Yet, most importantly, the Prince has come to understand the vanity of his attempts to make Enid his 'possession': neither by 'compassing his wife by sweet observances', nor by 'compelling her to his will', can he 'prove' her love, or "keep her true". Since Geraint has learned "that the value of Enid's love lies in her free choice to remain faithful to him" (Hair 162), they can now build the "true marriage" based on equality and perfect trust, which is integral to the poet's social

vision.

Tennyson again departs from the *Mabinogion* in his conclusion, inventing Geraint and Enid's meeting with Arthur and Edyrn, to describe this knight's "change of heart" which parallels the restoration of psychological order for Geraint. In Edyrn's account of his own transformation, the poet stresses the salutary influence of Guinevere's court, where, under the instruction of the priest, Dubric, Edyrn achieves the ideal balance of "that gentleness, / Which, when it weds with manhood, makes a man" (GE 866-67). Working to the same effect, in the case of Geraint, is "the holy power of [Enid's] Love".

The image of the "Gardener" reappears as the King praises the accomplishment of Edyrn, who has used

Both grace and will to pick the vicious quitch
Of blood and custom wholly out of him,
And make all clean, and plant himself afresh.
... weeding all his heart,
As I will weed this land before I go. (GE 902-06)

Arthur declares that this work of personal regeneration is "more great and wonderful" than the slaughter of an entire "realm / Of robbers," (GE 911-18), thus affirming the connection between individual order and the security of society. The affirmation is then repeated with the final picture of Geraint, restored to "life and use and name and fame" (GE 944-69). Having overcome the division within, the Prince is "whole again", fit to fulfill his chivalric responsibilities, and, having achieved that ideal union which creates a stable foundation for society, his marriage will now be blessed with children.

After beginning at the mid-point in the realm's decline with Merlin's fatal failure of will, Tennyson had moved back in time for the "Enid" idylls, to expand his vision of the realm at an earlier period when the ideal, though threatened, was

still thriving. The spiritual progress of Edyrn and Geraint, who are strengthened and renewed through the exercise of dispelling their personal demons, mirrors the re-establishment of social order described in the conclusion to "Geraint and Enid", as the King

... sent a thousand men
To till the wastes, and moving everywhere
Cleared the dark places, and let in the law
And broke the bandit holds and cleansed the land. (GE 940-43)

Having thus viewed the realm from two key stages in its history, Tennyson could now return to the point which had compelled his imagination from the start, i.e., the mournful end of the Arthurian civilization.

Shaped by his terrible personal loss, Tennyson's first treatment of the dissolution of Arthur's Order had focused on the passing of the great leader. Now his vision of the end, informed by his profound understanding of the human failure which led to it, would be expressed through the tragic figure of the Queen. The poet thus began the composition of his third idyll with Arthur's parting from Guinevere, making his wife a birthday gift (July 9, 1857) of the first lines written:

But hither shall I never come again,
Never lie by thy side; see thee no more —
Farewell! (G 575-77)

Tennyson found the setting for "Guinevere" in Malory's description of "the sombre close" (G 682) of her life in the abbey at Almesbury. As in his creation of "Vivien", the poet constructed from Malory's brief account (XXI iv 717-18), a highly original portrait of the Queen, whose enchanting beauty had formed part of his early engagement with the Arthurian legend. Moreover, in the evolution of Tennyson's conception of Guinevere, from the mythic creature of the 1832 'Fragment' to the noble Queen of the 1859 *Idylls*, we can observe the effect of his devel-

opment from private to social vision.

In the first idyll composed, the Queen is only a shadowy presence. Tennyson alludes to the subversive influence which she will have on the Arthurian ideal of "use", as Donald Hair remarks, in the legend of the Queen with "isle-nurtured eyes" (see note 4). Yet the description of Guinevere's encounter with Vivien (*MV* 65-134) was added much later, so that the only direct references to the Queen in the 1859 edition of "Vivien" are the comments on her relationship with Lancelot provided by the Wizard and the harlot.

Guinevere's "guilty love" is again suggested in the rumour which disturbs Geraint. However, while she is thus implicated in the problems of Geraint and Enid, the Queen is also associated with the beneficent influence which assists Edyrn in his "change of heart". Indeed, throughout the "Enid" idylls, Guinevere is presented as 'sweet and stately', "with all grace / Of womanhood and queenhood" (*MG* 175-76). Most significantly, Guinevere is bound in friendship and love to Tennyson's model of feminine virtue, Enid, who

... loved the Queen, and with true heart
Adored her, as the stateliest and the best
And loveliest of all women upon earth. (*MG* 19-21)

The Queen who next appears set "betwixt her best / Enid, and lissome Vivien, of her court / The wiliest and the worst;" (*G* 27-29), is a dignified woman, of "beauty, grace and power" (*G* 142). Yet, as a person of such noble stature, her actions must have formidable consequences. No longer can her love for Lancelot remain isolated as part of some sensual fantasy world: since she is an individual of great position and power, it becomes a failure which must be considered in terms of its social implications. Most importantly, though, Guinevere, herself, must recognize the magnitude of what she has lost so that she may undertake the movement

towards redemption. Tennyson's sympathetic treatment of "the sinful Queen" thus focuses on her spiritual development, revealing his own understanding of the powerful desire to withdraw into a private world of beauty, as well as his recognition of the harmful effects such escapes can have on both personal and social order.

The idyll opens on Guinevere, weeping "in the holy house at Almesbury" (*G* 2-3), then reviews the reasons for her retreat. Modred, "the subtle beast", whose traitorous aims "Were sharpened by strong hate for Lancelot", provided the immediate cause for flight, using his discovery of the lovers to provoke "disruption in the Table Round" (*G* 9-20). Tennyson makes it clear, however, that the Queen's spiritual progress had already begun while she still struggled to maintain the "trustful courtesies of household life," (*G* 85). The working of her conscience,

...   a vague spiritual fear—
Like to some doubtful noise of creaking doors,
Heard by the watch in a haunted house,
That keeps the rust of murder on the walls—   (*G* 70-73)

issues in a horrible nightmare of imminent disaster, in which her own shadow, "broadening from her feet, / And blackening, swallowed all the land, and in it / Far cities burnt," (*G* 80-82).

When Modred traps the lovers at their last desperate farewell, the Queen refuses Lancelot's protection, realizing that she must undergo the coming trial alone: "Would God that thou couldst hide me from myself!" (*G* 117). Fleeing then, through the night to Almesbury, the desolate condition of her soul is mirrored in "the glimmering waste and weald" and echoed in the moaning "Spirits" (*G* 126-30).

The withdrawal to the sanctuary is followed by a series of retreats to the past, as Tennyson composes from the memories, first, of a knight of the Round Table, then, of Guinevere, and finally, of the King, his most complete vision thus far of the foundation and destruction of the Arthurian Order.

In the abbey, Guinevere, "Wrapt in her grief," (G 147), remains solitary and unknown, hoping to conceal her shame. At first, her spiritual progress is suspended, for she does not seek forgiveness and release in communion, but speaks only with a little maid, whose "babbling heedlessness / . . . often lured her from herself" (G 149-50). "Shut in by nunnery walls," (G 225), the unworldly novice appears as the Queen's *alter ego*, and becomes the voice of her conscience, unwittingly expressing Guinevere's worst fears in the beautiful lyric, "Late, late, so late!" (G 166-77). Guinevere's painful sense of guilt continues to grow, as the garrulous maid, not guessing the identity of her stately, sorrowful guest, denounces the wickedness of the disloyal woman who "Hath wrought confusion in the Table Round" (G 218), then goes on to show, through her father's recollections, how "glad were spirits and men / Before the coming of the sinful Queen" (G 267-68).

The poet returns to the rich, mysterious land of the private vision to evoke the magical sights and sounds which attended the founding of the Order, in the little novice's account of her father's experience:

All down the lonely coast of Lyonesse,
 Each with a beacon-star upon his head,
 And with a wild sea-light about his feet,
 He saw them—headland after headland flame
 Far on into the rich heart of the west:
 And in the light the white mermaiden swam,
 And strong man-breasted things stood from the sea,
 And sent a deep sea-voice through all the land,
 To which the little elves of chasm and cleft
 Made answer, sounding like a distant horn.

. . . .
 And still, at evenings on before his horse
 The flickering fairy-cycle wheeled and broke
 Flying, and linked again, and wheeled and broke
 Flying, for all the land was full of life. (G 238-57)

In spite of the repeated grim reminders that the enchanted landscape has been

lighted by the "evil work of Lancelot and the Queen" (*G* 305), the effect of this lyrical passage is to recall the lost paradise of "Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere", which then reappears in the form of Guinevere's memories of those "golden days" (*G* 377). Having dismissed her distressing companion, the Queen allows herself to slip into "a trance, / And moving through the past unconsciously," (*G* 398-99), retraces her journey to the court with Lancelot, remembering how they

Rode under groves that looked a paradise
Of blossom, over sheets of hyacinth
That seemed the heavens upbreking through the earth,   (*G* 386-88)

This, however, will be the last escape to that prelapsarian "maytime, [when] as yet no sin was dreamed," (*G* 385), for as Guinevere arrives in memory at the point of that first disappointing glimpse of Arthur (*G* 400-05), the King, himself, enters the nunnery, and private vision gives way to social.

With the King's stern denunciation, Guinevere is forced to confront the full impact of her failure. "Thou hast spoilt the purpose of my life", he charges (*G* 448), and proceeds to define her role in the disintegration of the realm.

The King starts by recalling "the fair beginning" of his "glorious company". In the little novice's version of her father's memories (*G* 230-305), the origins of both King and company had been depicted as magical, mysterious events. Now the ideal foundation of the Order is presented, as Arthur articulates the vows by which his knights were bound (*G* 465-74), and establishes "the maiden passion for a maid" or "the holy power of Love" as the chief source of inspiration for chivalric conduct (*G* 474-80). Arthur then identifies Guinevere's "shameful sin with Lancelot" as the primary cause of disruption in the Order thus based on truth and fidelity, claiming that her adultery served as a "foul ensample" which led to further betrayals of the vows, and hence "the loathsome opposite" of the King's design unfolded (*G* 484-

90). Here, the poet uses Arthur's interpretation of the dissolution to express his own belief in the importance of the marriage bond to the health of society. Furthermore, Guinevere's guilt must be pressed, as Donald Hair observes (216-17), for her own sake, so that she may continue her vital spiritual progress:

Arthur's judgment of Guinevere, though severe, is tempered with forgiveness, love, and with the hope of redemption. By revealing to her the consequences of her actions not only on the social, but also on the personal level, showing in addition to the confusion she has wrought, the pain she has caused him, and above all, the love he still feels for her, he brings her to exercise her will in that "true repentance" which precedes spiritual regeneration.

Guinevere responds only after the King, folded in the mist, has departed for "that great battle in the west" (G 568). She now understands that her own "false voluptuous pride" had obscured her vision, preventing her from perceiving her husband's 'true' nature, just as Geraint's pride had prevented him from seeing Enid's 'truth'. Daunted by the King's "pure severity", she had failed even to aspire to his ideals (G 639-41), yielding instead to the very human yearning "for warmth and colour which [she] found / in Lancelot" (G 642-43). At last, through the passionate revelation of Arthur's sorrow and love, she sees him clearly—as "the highest and *most human* too,"⁶ (G 644), and so reaches the poignant recognition of what she has lost: "Ah my God, / What might I not have made of thy fair world, / Had I but loved thy highest creature here?" (G 649-51).

Now acknowledging her identity to the sisterhood, the Queen realizes that she must no longer dwell on the loss of her worldly reputation ("that defeat of fame" G 623), but undertake the life of penance which can purify her soul (G 669-83). Tennyson closes the idyll by recording the completion of Guinevere's spiritual

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⁶My italics.

progress:

Then she, for her good deeds and pure life,
 And for the power of ministration in her,
 And likewise for the high rank she had borne,
 Was chosen Abbess, there, an Abbess, lived
 For three brief years, and there, an Abbess, past
 To where beyond these voices there is peace. (G 687-92)

Elements of both his private and social vision thus mark the poet's treatment of "Guinevere". In Arthur's view of the foundation and destruction of the Round Table, Tennyson affirms the importance of the marital bond to the social order. Marriage is seen as the relationship in which the Arthurian values of truth and fidelity can be most perfectly expressed, and Guinevere's betrayal regarded accordingly as a grievous failure which not only wounds Arthur personally, but undermines the basis of his Order. At the same time, the poet's sympathy for the Queen is conveyed through his beautiful evocation of the early days of the realm, suggesting his own powerful yearning to escape. Above all, Tennyson's interest in the poem is in the emotional and spiritual experience of the characters, a concern which continues to engage him in "Elaine",⁷ the fourth of the 1859 *Idylls*.

Having designed "Guinevere" as the final idyll of the 'True/False' group, Tennyson next moved back in the realm's time, as he had after the composition of "Vivien", to expand on the major themes of the group. In "Elaine", the poet extends his treatment of the Guinevere/Lancelot relationship, concentrating on the effect of their passion on Arthur's most noble knight. Adapting Malory's story of "The Fair Maid of Astolat" (XVIII ii 621-42), Tennyson uses Lancelot's involvement with "the lily maid" to consider once more the problem of the divided will, and to explore further the healing/destructive power of love.

Again, Tennyson enters the idyll *in medias res*, presenting Elaine "High in

⁷The 1859 title was revised to "Lancelot and Elaine" in 1869.

her chamber up a tower to the east / [Guarding] the sacred shield of Lancelot;" (LE 3-4), then recounts the events which brought "that good shield" into her care. The opening passage describing the maiden's secluded situation and immersion in a life of fantasy (LE 1-27), also marks her connection with "The Lady of Shalott", a connection which will reappear in Elaine's tragic response to the emotional shock of Lancelot's rejection.

The poet immediately darkens the mood of the poem with his invention of the grisly background to the tournament which forms its central action (LE 34-44). Long before he became King, Arthur, "roving the trackless realms of Lyonesse," (LE 35), had come upon a glen where the horror of an ancient crime still clung like a mist, for there two brothers, one a king, had fought and slain each other. Arthur claimed the crown of the nameless murderer, and when he, himself, was crowned, established its nine diamonds as the prizes for an annual test of his knights' prowess, so that they might "grow / In use of arms and manhood" (LE 56-64).

The fratricide episode, according to John Rosenberg, forecasts the fate of "Balin and Balan" (*The Fall of Camelot* 55). In addition, Tennyson may be looking forward to Lancelot's deadly combat with his family in the doleful history of the diamonds, or perhaps alluding to the more sinister aspect of the knight's close relationship with his King.

After this ominous introduction, Tennyson adapts a scene from Malory to initiate the action and clarify the focus of the idyll. Lancelot is eager to complete his gift for the Queen by winning the ninth diamond, but when illness prevents her from attending the jousts, the knight, believing that she wishes him to remain with her, excuses himself as well, on the pretext of an unhealed wound (LE 73-96). The Queen rebukes her lover for this indiscretion, fearing that their absence will raise comment. She advises Lancelot to participate in disguise, assuring him that the

King will forgive the deception when told that Lancelot has concealed his "great name" in order to win greater glory as an unknown challenger (*LE* 148-57).

This incident is designed to develop the Guinevere/Lancelot relationship. Again Tennyson reveals how the King's idealism—"That passionate perfection"—has alienated Guinevere (*LE* 120-35), although at this point the Queen is unrepentant, and scorns her husband as "A moral child without the craft to rule, / Else had he not lost me:" (*LE* 145-46). Later in the idyll, Tennyson will suggest the strength of Guinevere's feelings for Lancelot through her jealous anger (*LE* 603-10, 734-39). However, the poet wishes now to focus on the effect of the Guinevere/Lancelot love on the best of Arthur's knights, showing how what is most noble in man becomes most destructive. For this purpose, he has Guinevere contrive the disguise scheme, a revision of his source which, as David Staines notes (57), will connect Guinevere with the mortal wound that Lancelot suffers at the jousts.

Distressed at the Queen's cool management of the situation, and "wroth at himself. Not willing to be known," (*LE* 159), the knight departs for the tournament. Moreover, the unfamiliar route chosen by Lancelot indicates that his journey, like the other wasteland quests of the 1859 *Idylls*, will be treated as a psychological experience, for "there among the solitary downs, / Full often lost in fancy, [he] lost his way;" (*LE* 162-63).

Lancelot's solitary path leads him to the Castle of Astolat, where, warmly welcomed by the Baron and his family, he finds both the necessary blank shield, and a companion for the jousts in young Lavaine. The poet enlarges the sojourn at the Castle to present another view of the establishment of the realm in Lancelot's account "Of Arthur's glorious wars" (*LE* 285-316), which stresses the knight's honour of his heroic leader. More importantly, Tennyson emphasizes the grace and courtesy of the noble visitor who is recognized "by [his] state / And presence . . .

[as] chief of those, / After the King, who eat in Arthur's halls" (*LE* 181-83). At the same time, the first full view of Lancelot's troubled soul is revealed through the innocent eyes of the Baron's daughter. In the masterful descriptive passage which exposes the problem of Lancelot's divided will, the poet condenses, as J.M. Gray notes (*Thro' the Vision* 22), the essential elements of Malory's homage to the great knight, and deftly conveys his emotional impact on Elaine:

The great and guilty love he bare the Queen,
In conflict with the love he bare his lord,
Had marred his face, and marked it ere his time.
Another sinning on such heights with one,
The flower of all the west and all the world,
Had been the sleeker for it: but in him
His mood was often like a fiend, and rose
And drove him into wastes and solitudes
For agony, who was yet a living soul.
Marred as he was, he seemed the goodliest man
That ever among ladies ate in hall,
And noblest, when she lifted up her eyes.
However marred, of more than twice her years,
Seamed with an ancient swordcut on the cheek,
And bruised and bronzed, she lifted up her eyes
And loved him with that love which was her doom. (*LE* 244-59)

Before Lancelot leaves the next morning, Elaine, to whom he has entrusted his shield, completes his disguise by persuading him to wear her token on his helmet. Appearing at the jousts as "a stranger knight", then, he is severely wounded by his own kinsmen, who are determined to defend "the name / Of Lancelot, and a glory one with theirs" (*LE* 475-76). Again, as in the combats of Geraint, Tennyson uses the physical struggle to dramatize the conflict within: Lancelot, attacked by his own 'blood' is shown to be truly at war with himself.

Discovering Lancelot's identity and his fate from Gawain, whom Arthur had sent in search of the wounded knight, Elaine sets out, with his hard-won prize, for

Camelot. Directed by Lavaine, she finds Lancelot, "Gaunt as it were the skeleton of himself," (*LE* 811), resting in a hermit's cave.

The poet employs Malory's account of Elaine's careful attendance (*XVIII* ii 633), concentrating on her emotional involvement with "the sick knight". Upborne by "her deep love", she nurses Lancelot so devotedly, that "the hermit, skilled in all / The simples and the science of that time, / Told him that her fine care had saved his life" (*LE* 856-58). Lancelot, in turn, responds to Elaine "with all the love except the love / Of man and woman when they love their best, / Closest and sweetest," (*LE* 863-65). Moreover, "in his mid-sickness", the knight makes "many a holy vow and pure resolve", but as his strength returns, so does his passion for the Queen (*LE* 873-79). While the physical wound is healed, the division within is yet to be resolved.

In her role as 'true' maiden, Elaine thus demonstrates the healing power of love, working to restore Lancelot to life, and in effect, renewing his spiritual struggle. However, this "meek maid" is a more complex character than her counterpart, Enid, who is the most conventional of the 'True/~~False~~' females, and is limited to displaying unswerving loyalty in the role of faithful wife. The passionate and wilful Elaine, on the other hand, is more closely linked with Guinevere, whose love for Lancelot also becomes her doom.

When Lancelot, fully recovered, presses Elaine to name "some goodly gift" as a reward for her tender care, she desperately confesses her desire "To serve . . . and . . . follow [him] through the world". (*LE* 934). Refusing to so dishonour her family, the knight then gently attempts to free Elaine from what he hopes must be a youthful infatuation, trusting that she will later marry "one more fitly [hers]," (*LE* 944-48). He offers to make her a generous dowry, and pledges to serve as her loyal champion, "Even to the death, as though [she] were [his] blood," (*LE* 951-56),

but sadly, still 'shackled by an old love' (LE 870-72), he can not promise more. Elaine, however, is resolved that she must have "Him or death . . . death or him," (LE 897).

Tennyson's comment, "The tenderest of all natures sinks under the blight," (quoted in *Poems* 1621), implies that Elaine is to be considered a victim of the guilty love which binds Lancelot, yet the poet's imaginative engagement is most evident in his treatment of the psychological process by which Elaine's passion becomes transformed into a death-wish. A familiar Tennysonian note sounds in "The Song of Love and Death", and when "Death, like a friend's voice from a distant field / Approaching through the darkness [calls];" (LE 992-93), the poet makes it clear that the lily maid wilfully chooses to yield to the sweet appeal.

With Elaine's funeral journey down the river to Camelot, which closely resembles that of "The Lady of Shalott", the focus shifts once more to the Guinevere/Lancelot relationship. In a scene created by the poet, Lancelot attempts to placate the Queen with "his costly gift" of the diamonds, but Guinevere, hurt and resentful, will not be reconciled. Her lover's rumoured betrayal has forced the Queen to recognize the wrong she has done "To one whom ever in [her] heart of hearts [she] did acknowledge nobler" (LE 1203-04), an admission which prepares for the spiritual development to take place in her own idyll. Yet, still angry and jealous, unwilling either to reunite with Lancelot or to release him, Guinevere spitefully flings the love-offering, which had nearly cost his life, into the river. Then, as Lancelot, "in half disgust / At love, life, all things," (LE 1230-31), watches the diamonds, "The price of half a realm," (LE 1157), disappear beneath the surface, he is confronted with an immeasurable loss in the sight of "the barge / Whereon the lily maid of Astolat / Lay smiling, like a star in blackest night" (LE 1233-35).

The rest of the poem is devoted to the impact of Elaine's death on the great

knight. Arthur reads aloud the lily maid's poignant farewell, in which she declares that "[her] true love has been [her] death" (*LE* 1269), a statement that Lancelot must sorrowfully confirm (*LE* 1280-98). After Elaine has been laid to rest "with gorgeous obsequies, / . . . like a queen" (*LE* 1324-25), Tennyson presents the King's view of the tragedy. Full of affection for his dearest friend, Arthur is saddened that Lancelot could not return the love of one so "Delicately pure and marvellously fair," who seemed divinely shaped for him alone (*LE* 1353-58). Believing that Lancelot is "unbound as yet", the King can not conceive what could have prevented such an ideal union which might have given his greatest knight, "now a lonely man / Wifeless and heirless, noble issue, sons / Born to the glory of [his] name and fame," (*LE* 1359-61).

Troubled by these remarks, Lancelot withdraws to consider the moral issues raised by his King's concern. The great knight can take no satisfaction in the name he has fought to establish, for he realizes that his sin perverts the "use" or purpose of such a glorious reputation. Once his betrayal is well known, Lancelot's fame, rather than providing "ampler means to serve mankind", will become the source of corruption, serving only "To make men worse . . . / Or sin seem less, the sinner seeming great" (*LE* 1406-07).

At the root of the problem is that failure of will, with which Tennyson began the 1859 *Idylls*. Lancelot is resolved to break the connection that so defames him, yet remains emotionally bound to Guinevere (*LE* 1409-11). In his state of "remorseful pain", he longs for oblivion, wishing to be lost, like the nameless sinners of the glen, "deep in that forgotten mere, / Among the tumbled fragments of the hills" (*LE* 1515-16). The idyll thus ends with Lancelot, the chief of Arthur's knights, still sorely divided, virtually as powerless as the great Wizard, "imprisoned in the hollow oak", although Tennyson does extend the hope that Lancelot will "die

a holy man" (*LE* 1418).

After finishing "Elaine" in February, 1859, the poet began to prepare the 'True/False' *Idylls* for publication. With the arrangement of these idylls in their intended sequence, the fundamental design for Tennyson's Arthurian work was clear. Beginning with the affirmation of the ideals, the "Enid" poems illustrate the connection of personal to social order. The structural centre of the group, formed by "Vivien" and followed by "Elaine", is concerned with the paralysis or failure of will, which in turns leads to the disintegration of the realm presented in "Guinevere".

In the process of composing each poem, Tennyson had been developing the elements essential to his treatment of the Arthurian legend. Rooted in the pre-occupations we identified in his earliest poetry—the enchanting power of sensual beauty, the desire to escape, the problem of creative paralysis—the 1859 *Idylls* are engaged with the emotional/spiritual experience of the individual. Furthermore, the poet's social vision shaped his conception of the ideal basis of the Arthurian Order, and informs his interpretation of its dissolution in the 'True/False' group. Love is presented as a powerful force which can energize the will and inspire chivalric conduct, and marriage shown as the relationship in which the Arthurian ideals may be most perfectly realized. Tennyson, however, concentrates in these idylls on the breakdown of relationship which results when emotional reality conflicts with the ideal.

Having thus created a structural and thematic framework with *The True and the False*, Tennyson would in his next group of idylls consider other factors involved in the decline of Arthur's Order. As we examine now the later stages of Tennyson's Arthurian quest, we shall observe how the domestic focus of the 1859 *Idylls* widens, as the poet proceeds to expand and complete his vision of "The goodliest fellowship of famous knights / Whereof this world holds record" (*PA* 183-84).

CHAPTER THREE

The Vision of the Grail

Tennyson was already preparing for the composition of further Arthurian idylls while he was engaged in correcting the proofs of the 1859 set. Entries in Lady Tennyson's *Journal* for May 23rd and June 28th, 1859 (135, 137), record that the poet was reading "La Beale Isoude" and "Sir Pelleas and Ettarre" from his edition of Malory.

Additional inspiration to proceed with the project came with the reaction to the 1859 *Idylls*. While a few commentators, notably John Ruskin (*Memoir* 1: 452-54), still complained of the material's 'remoteness' from modern life (see also Tillotson 94, 95), and there were some objections to the immorality of the lascivious "Vivien"¹ (Charles Tennyson 318), the reviews were generally highly enthusiastic. The "moral elevation" of the work was especially approved (Gladstone in Jump 263), although Tennyson's old friend Thackeray, a most discerning reader, took the greatest delight in the lyrical qualities of the poems, comparing these *Idylls* to the "Arabian Nights" of his childhood, and perceiving their links with the magical "Elfland" of the poet's private vision (*Memoir* 1: 445).

In spite of the popular reception of the 1859 *Idylls*, and the considerable encouragement of Tennyson's closest friends, actual production of the *The Idylls of the King* was halted for nearly ten years. One reason cited by the poet for the long hiatus was the fitness of the ending presented in "Guinevere": "I could hardly light upon a finer close than that ghost-like passing away of the King" (*Memoir* 2: 126). Yet the breakup of Arthur's Order continued to possess the poet's imagination during the long period of planning the next group of idylls, with the result that

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¹ The Rev. J.B. Jowett, on the other hand, most admired what he called "the naughty one", praising "Vivien" as "a work of wonderful power and skill" (*Memoir* 1: 449).

three of the four idylls published in 1869 were concerned with the realm's decline.

In fact the second stage of composition, beginning in 1868, commenced, as had the first, with Tennyson's treatment of an episode critical to the dissolution of the Arthurian civilization. In "The Holy Grail", which was to follow "Lancelot and Elaine", the pursuit of a false ideal is shown to have the same destructive effect upon the social order as the influence of false love had previously had upon personal order. Combining in his next idyll the motifs of misplaced idealism, unrequited love and betrayal, Tennyson created a dark reflection of the Arthur/Guinevere/Lancelot triangle in "Pelleas and Ettarre", which serves as a connecting link between "Lancelot and Elaine" and "Guinevere". Finally, with the other two Arthurian poems written during this time (1868-69), "The Coming of Arthur" and "The Passing of Arthur" (the expanded version of the "Morte d'Arthur"), the poet constructed a formal introduction and conclusion for the six idylls which he now grouped under the heading of the "Round Table".²

The title under which the second set of idylls was published, *The Holy Grail and Other Poems*, indicates the importance Tennyson accorded to the Grail quest within his Arthurian cycle. As in "Merlin and Vivien", an event central to the disintegration process is designed to represent, as well, a retrospective view of how the Round Table had originally been conceived.

²Tennyson prefaced the 1870 American edition of *The Holy Grail and Other Poems* with a note directing that "The whole series should be read . . . in the following order: -"

The Coming of Arthur

The Round Table
 Geraint and Enid
 Merlin and Vivien
 Lancelot and Elaine
 The Holy Grail
 Pelleas and Ettarre
 Guinevere

The Passing of Arthur

While Malory again serves as his medieval source, the poet's imaginative treatment of the Grail legend is clearly modelled on the approach established in the 'True/False' *Idylls*. Opening "The Holy Grail" *in medias res*. Tennyson describes the situation of Percivale, formerly a vigorous knight of the Order, who has retired to "the silent life of prayer, / . . . / . . . in an abbey far away / From Camelot," (*HG* 4-7). Percivale's seclusion and the companionship of his fellow-monk, Ambrosius, parallel Guinevere's relationship with the little novice in her isolation at Almesbury. Moreover, just as the novice's remarks had prepared Guinevere for the judgment of Arthur, the comments of Ambrosius provide a homely version of the views expressed by the King, as in response to the monk's promptings, Percivale narrates the history of the quest which "Drove [him] from the Table Round" (*HG* 28).

As we have already noted, Tennyson's first written version of the Grail quest³ had, like "Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere", been presented as another variation on the early pattern of escape. The glorious images which the poet uses to describe the miraculous vision (*HG* 116-23) and the apotheosis of Galahad (*HG* 504-22) in "The Holy Grail" will, in fact, recall his portrayal of the attractions of the spiritual life in "Sir Galahad". However, the social consequences of this form of retreat, which were ignored in the earlier poem, must now be considered, in accordance with the design of the *The Idylls of the King*. The poet therefore focuses on the experience of Sir Percivale, who, in the course of his search must choose between the satisfactions of an active life of service and the elusive vision of the Grail.

Percivale's sister, the nun who initiates "the Holy Quest", like Elaine, is another victim of unrequited love, but in this maiden, the "fervent flame of human love, / . . . rudely blunted," becomes transformed into a spiritual passion (*HG* 72-77).

³"Sir Galahad", written by September, 1834, was published in the 1842 volume of *Poems*. Writing to the Duke of Argyll of the difficulty of handling this subject (Oct. 3rd, 1859), Tennyson remarked that he had composed another version, "Lancelot's Quest of the Grail", many years before, but had never written it down (*Memoir* 1: 456-57).

Obsessed by "the scandal of the Court, / Sin against Arthur and the Table Round," (*HG* 78-79), she seeks to bring back the healing cup which had disappeared when "the times / Grew to such evil" (*HG* 56-57). By devoting herself to a severe course of prayer and fasting, "the holy maid" attains the state of complete self-denial in which the miraculous sight may be perceived (*HG* 95-128). She then inspires Sir Galahad, her spiritual brother, with her "deathless passion" (*HG* 149-65).

Galahad commits himself to "The Siege perilous", the mysterious seat "Fashioned by Merlin ere he past away," so that he may 'lose himself to save himself' (*HG* 167-78). Upon this extraordinary act of self-sacrifice, the vision of the Grail appears in Arthur's hall, "All covered with a luminous cloud, / And none might see who bare it, and it past" (*HG* 189-90). Percivale then leads those knights present in swearing to search "A twelvemonth and a day" until he shall find and see the Holy Vessel.

Tennyson alters his source so that Arthur is away, carrying out his duty of maintaining order in the realm when "this marvel" occurs. Returning to Camelot, the King sees only the "thunder-smoke" attending the vision, which he at once identifies as a threat to his "great hall" (*HG* 217-21). The poet then presents Percivale's recollection of that "mighty hall" to review the evolution of the Arthurian civilization. The "four great zones of sculpture" which surround the chamber illustrate the realm's progression from a state of savagery to the present Order of "warriors, perfect men," who have the potential to become "the crowning race" of "men with growing wings," which is represented by the statue of their leader (*HG* 232-40).

Learning of the quest his knights have undertaken, the King refuses to join them, for he recognizes the holy nun's vision as "A sign to maim this Order which

[he] made" (*HG* 297).⁴ The support of the realm chiefly depends upon the "noble deeds" of his knights, who are, for the most part, "men / With strength and will to right the wronged, of power / To lay the sudden heads of violence flat," (*HG* 308-10). Arthur fears that when they abandon such 'useful' work to pursue a course for which most are spiritually unfit, the energy of his Order will be wasted, and its purpose defeated, as his knights "follow wandering fires" to become "lost in the quagmire!" (*HG* 319-20).

Percivale's own quest, indeed, seems doomed to end in disappointment, for he is frustrated with hallucinations in which all the gratifications of temporal life appear, only to crumble into dust and vanish, as he fears the Grail will vanish, should he find it (*HG* 379-439). At length he comes upon "a holy hermit in a hermitage" who reminds him that the Holy Cup will only be revealed to one who has achieved that condition of "true humility" which comes from the complete denial of 'self'. Like Galahad, Percivale must 'lose himself to save himself'.

When Galahad, himself, appears, he tells Percivale of the supernatural strength he has gained from his holy vision (*HG* 464-81). Overcome by the knight's belief, Percivale then witnesses Galahad's ascent into the spiritual city, which is accompanied by the unveiling of the Holy Vessel (*HG* 504-33).

Tennyson creates a mundane contrast to this mystic experience with Ambrosius' response to "miracles and marvels", stressing that the effect of all such wondrous accounts is to increase the monk's involvement and pleasure in the routine cares and comforts of everyday life (*HG* 540-60). Although the monk who speaks "too earthlywise", may not rise to the spiritual vision of the King, his happy capacity to "Rejoice, small man, in this small world of [his]," (*HG* 559), illustrates

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⁴Trollope offers a prosaic, but perfectly accurate interpretation of the King's decision in *The Eustace Diamonds* (1873): "Arthur did not go on the search, because he had a job of work to do, by the doing of which the people around him might perhaps be somewhat benefited" (209).

the rewards which come from the practice of the Arthurian ideal of "use". In addition, Ambrosius' strong emotional tie to Percivale, as well as his lively interest in the villagers, contrasts sharply with the alienation of his friend, who was "so bound by such a vow" that "All men, . . . / And women were as phantoms" (*HG* 564-65).

Percivale's estrangement from common human experience is further developed through the poet's adaptation of the temptation episode in Malory (*XIV iii* 549-50). Confessing to Ambrosius that he had nearly faltered from the quest, Percivale tells of his reunion with his first love, who, as a wealthy widow, had offered him marriage and the opportunity to rule "as Arthur in [her] land" (*HG* 572-605). With his anguished decision to persevere in his search, Percivale must forgo the satisfactions of a life rich in purpose and commitment. Once again, as Ambrosius pities the knight for losing all the sweetness and "warmth of double life," the reaction of the monk focuses on the emotional cost of the quest (*HG* 618-22).

The full cost of the quest to Arthur's Order is presented in the idyll's conclusion, when "but a tithe" of his knights, "Wasted and worn," return to find Camelot in ruins (*HG* 712-20). After listening to various accounts, including that of the "reckless and irreverent" Gawain (*HG* 738-47), and most importantly, that of his "mightiest" (*HG* 763-849), the King reflects upon the sad fulfillment of his "dark prophecy" (*HG* 884-90). Both Galahad, who "had the vision face to face," and Percivale, who beheld it from afar, are lost to the Round Table, "leaving human wrongs to right themselves" (*HG* 894). Bors, who achieved the vision, "according to [his] sight" (*HG* 871), can not bear to speak of it, while Lancelot, in spite of his terrible spiritual struggle, remains locked in a state of "remorseful pain".

What Arthur's greatest knights undertook in a spirit of true self-sacrifice degenerated into the pursuit of "selfish religious excitement" (*Poems* 1661) for others. Moreover, whatever the personal motivation for the quest, its end results are disas-

trous for the Order. That extreme asceticism which alienates the individual from his fellows, or leads to the abdication of earthly responsibilities is thus seen to pose as great a threat to the security of society as does the amorality of the unbeliever. The consequences of false religious enthusiasm will be treated again in the final idyll written, where King Pellam's selfish asceticism creates a realm as "lawless" and dangerous as that of the Earl Doorm.

With the vision of "The Holy Grail", the poet expands the social message of the *The Idylls of the King*. While Tennyson believed in an unseen spiritual life, he realized that, for most, "the restless quest for religious certainty" would end in failure, and could paralyze the will (Priestly 642). 'Proof' of the spiritual ideal, nevertheless, can be manifest in reality, with, for example, the "noble deeds" of Arthur's knights, which "prove to him his work" (LE 157). True spiritual revelation, then, is to be achieved through dedication to one's appointed task, as is shown in the final passage of the King's speech. Arthur, like Merlin "needs must work [his] work" (MV 503), but his work "being done", he may experience:

. . . moments when he feels he cannot die,
And knows himself no vision to himself,
Nor the high God a vision, nor that One
Who rose again: . . . (HG 912-15)

In his next idyll, Tennyson returns to the emotional problems which had characterized the 'True/False' group. Having first considered the possibilities of Malory's story of "Pelleas and Ettarre" in 1859, as we noted, the poem Tennyson composed ten years later was designed to follow "The Holy Grail", moving from spiritual to sensual passion, and presenting another stage in the deterioration of Arthur's Order. Again, this idyll reveals how the realm is destroyed from within, as the poet shows how the most intense idealism can become transformed into a violent destructive force.

One of the new knights created by Arthur in his efforts to restore the strength of the Round Table after the disastrous Grail quest, young Pelleas has the potential to become a noble member of the Order for he worships the King, "whose lightest whisper moved him more / Than all the rangèd reasons of the world" (*PE* 148–49). Ironically, what could be this Arthurian knight's greatest source of strength—his fervent idealism—makes him most vulnerable to betrayal.

The poem begins with Pelleas lost in a state of unfocused sensual desire, which the poet brilliantly conveys through his description of the blazing summer heat and "green-glooming twilight of the grove" (*PE* 21–45). Suddenly awakened from his reverie by the appearance of the Lady Ettarre, the ingenuous youth at once identifies this dazzling creature as the maiden "fair . . . and pure as Guinevere" whom he has been imagining, and invests the haughty beauty with "All the young beauty of his own soul" (*PE* 79).

The woodland setting of their first encounter, as well as Ettarre's effect on Pelleas, who can not sleep "for pleasure in his blood, / And green wood-ways, and eyes among the leaves;" (*PE* 131–32), suggests her alliance with Vivien. Another beautiful, seductive creature of Nature, Ettarre is completely self-centred and manipulative. Moreover, the imaginative power of her characterization may be rooted in the poet's personal experience of rejection, according to Ralph Rader, who links the physical description of Ettarre which features her small stature and "violet eyes . . . / . . . the haunts of scorn," (*PE* 67–73) with Tennyson's memories of Rosa Baring (54–55). In addition, Rader speculates that Rosa may also have inspired the lyric (*PE* 391–400) which Tennyson added in 1873 to precede Pelleas' discovery of Ettarre's betrayal (55). Most important, though, is the role Ettarre plays as "Guinevere" to Pelleas' "Arthur", for their relationship parallels and illuminates the breakdown of Arthur's marriage.

Desiring to be crowned "Queen of Beauty" at the jousts, Ettarre pledges to love Pelleas, should he win the golden circlet for her. Once the coveted prize and title are hers, however, Ettarre dismisses her youthful champion, repelled by his lack of sophistication. Believing that his Queen's ungracious behaviour is merely intended to 'test his faith' (*PE* 202-03), Pelleas pursues Ettarre to her castle, and there undergoes further trials of his love.

Enraged by his persistent devotion, Ettarre has Pelleas bound and brought before her in order to disenchant him, but "the sight / Of her rich beauty made him at one glance / More bondsman in his heart than in his bonds" (*PE* 229-31). Although she berates him, mocking his vows and the King he so reveres (*PE* 244), then has him thrust out again, the loyal knight returns, "like a dog before his master's door!" (*PE* 255).

Ettarre admits Pelleas once more, at last convincing him that his suit is hopeless. This time, however, the knight's "princely bearing" and courteous speech (*PE* 288-96) provoke an involuntary response in Ettarre, as she perceives that she has rejected Pelleas' love because his "fulsome innocence", his very nobility seemed to reproach her, making her uncomfortably aware of her own lack of virtue (*PE* 299-303). "He is not my kind. / He could not love me, did he know me well" (*PE* 303-04), she decides, revealing the same sense of personal unworthiness which has prompted Guinevere to reject the King's idealism.

Ettarre's "evil spite" persuades Pelleas to abandon his suit, but not his love: more brutal disillusionment is to follow. Gawain, who happened to witness the disgraceful treatment of his brother-knight, proposes a doubtful scheme to secure Ettarre's favour for Pelleas, to which the unhappy youth agrees. When Gawain does not return as promised, Pelleas, anxious to learn of his success, enters the gates, himself. The night is "Hot . . . and silent", as Pelleas passes through a setting,

rich in erotic suggestion (*PE* 409–18), to discover in a “gilden-peakt” pavilion, the sleeping lovers.

With Pelleas’ savage reaction to his betrayal, the poet creates a powerful prevision of ‘the realm reeling back into beast’. His faith in the brotherhood destroyed; his love debased to lust, Pelleas is dehumanized, and degenerates into a howling wolf. “Maddened with himself”, he rides off into the night, calling upon the forces of Nature to blast the harlot’s towers: “Let the fierce east scream . . . / And whirl the dust of harlots round and round / In dung and nettles!” (*PE* 460–62). He rages against the King, renouncing those “noble vows” which, by raising men above the beasts, have reduced men to “fools and liars” (*PE* 469–72).

Collapsing in exhaustion at the abbey “where Percivale was cowed,” (*PE* 491), Pelleas is engulfed in a nightmare of destruction. That mighty hall, so proudly recalled by Percivale (*HG* 225–57), had been damaged in the fierce gale which had heralded the end of the Grail quest (*HG* 726–30), and now seems threatened with total ruin, as Pelleas dreams that the traitor “Gawain fired / The hall of Merlin, and the morning star / Reeled into smoke, brake into flame, and fell” (*PE* 507–09). Nightmare merges into reality, when, upon awakening, Pelleas learns from Percivale that Arthur’s Queen, too, is “false” (*PE* 510–22). As he speeds towards Camelot, then, we see through Pelleas’ eyes, “the hall that Merlin built, / Blackening against the dead-green stripes of even” (*PE* 542–43).

Clashing with Lancelot, Pelleas refuses to identify himself. The process of dehumanization and reversal is complete: the once idealistic young knight has become a nameless “scourge . . . / To lash the treasons of the Table Round” (*PE* 553–54), in effect, turning the strength of Arthur’s Order in upon itself. “The crime of Lancelot and the Queen”—that violation of the Order’s honour—combined with the terrible personal betrayal, have thus unleashed in Pelleas the poisonous forces of “wrath

and shame and hate and evil fame" (PE 556) which will ultimately destroy the Arthurian civilization.

While "The Holy Grail" dominates the 1869 *Idylls* with its expansion of the poet's social vision, his treatment of "Pelleas and Ettarre" was equally important to the final design of the *The Idylls of the King*. By reworking and extending the lines originally drawn in the "True/False" *Idylls*, Tennyson once more exposes the breakdown of the realm on both the personal and social levels, as he had first in "Merlin and Vivien". Again, the connection of individual psychological balance to the support of the social order is stressed, although the problem here is not paralysis of will, but the transformation of vital energy into a force for destruction. Like Lancelot, who remains "Love-loyal to the least wish of the Queen," (G 125), Pelleas, "More bondsman in his heart than in his bonds" (PE 231), is paralysed temporarily, but the experience of betrayal releases and fatally redirects his will. At the same time, by reflecting and illuminating the relationship of Arthur and his Queen, the poet prepares for the tragedy of the "Guinevere" idyll which followed "Pelleas and Ettarre" in the 1869 arrangement, providing a particularly effective transition to "Guinevere" with the concluding passage of "Pelleas and Ettarre":

. . . . . The Queen
 Looked hard upon her lover, he on her;
 And each foresaw the dolorous day to be:
 And all talk died, as in a grove of song
 Beneath the shadow of some bird of prey;
 Then a long silence came upon the hall,
 And Modred thought, 'The time is hard at hand.' (PE 591-97)

The situation explored in "Pelleas and Ettarre" also helped to shape the composition of the two idylls written almost concurrently during the final creative phase of Tennyson's Arthurian quest (1870-75). In "The Last Tournament" (1871), the poet completes his portrayal of Pelleas, following out his violent course as the "Red

Knight". Dispatching a maimed churl to deliver his scornful challenge, the "Red Knight" defies Arthur from his "Round Table in the North", which represents the total reversal of Arthurian values (*LT* 77-88). Arthur, himself, defeats the infamous challenger, but in the massacre that ensues, his own knights 'reel back into beast', forgetting their leader and their vows to plunge into an orgy of blood-letting (*LT* 454-83). Returning to an earlier stage in the Order's history, Tennyson constructs in "Gareth and Lynette" (1872), a situation parallel to that of "Pelleas and Ettarre". Taken from an episode in Malory, this poem presents another idealistic young knight undergoing a series of humiliating trials of his loyalty and love, in service to another haughty Lady. However, because Gareth always conducts himself as Lynette's 'servant', rather than her 'slave', he succeeds in realizing his potential as a noble member of the Round Table.

The poet's masterful use of setting to heighten mood in "Pelleas and Ettarre" conveying, as we observed, sexual tension through the summer landscape, serves as well to integrate the poem into the larger work, by locating it within the natural cycle which defines the structure of the *The Idylls of the King*. The natural cycle also figures prominently in the poet's later additions, and is used most effectively in the other two 1869 *Idylls* which were created to mark the beginning and the end of Tennyson's Arthurian realm.

"The world is white with May;" (*CA* 481) for the marriage which forms much of the action of "The Coming of Arthur". While the King's role as ideal leader is the primary concern of this introduction to the *Idylls*, Tennyson establishes first the importance of his marriage. The poem, in fact, begins by focusing on Guinevere:

Leodogran, the King of Cameliard,
 Had one fair daughter, and none other child;
 And she was fairest of all flesh on earth,
 Guinevere, and in her his one delight. (*CA* 1-4)

Guinevere dwells in a savage wasteland, where "wild dog, and wolf and boar and bear / Came night and day, and rooted in the fields, / And wallowed in the gardens of the King" (CA 23-25). Beast and man are one in Cameliard, a realm overrun by "wolf-like men, / Worse than the wolves", and invaded by "a heathen horde" (CA 26-40). With the expedition which "Arthur newly crowned" undertakes in answer to Leodogran's desperate call, Tennyson presents the Arthurian model for the construction of order out of chaos, as the King brings the light of civilization to this barbarous wilderness, driving out the heathen, slaying the beast, "letting in the sun, and [making] / Broad pathways for the hunter and the knight" (CA 58-61).

Yet, with these "noble deeds" accomplished, Arthur sees all further success as entirely dependent upon his union with Guinevere:

. . . . . for saving I be joined
To her that is the fairest under heaven,
I seem as nothing in the mighty world,
And cannot will my will, nor work my work
Wholly, nor make myself in mine own realm
Victor and lord . . . (CA 84-89)

"But were [he] joined with her," then follows a vision of the future remarkably similar to that expressed by Ida's Prince (*The Princess* vii 284-90), as Arthur and his Queen shall

. . . . . live together as one life,
And reigning with one will in everything
Have power on this dark land to lighten it
And power on this dead world to make it live. (CA 90-93)

At the same time that Tennyson thus establishes the central importance of Arthur's marriage to the success of his Order, he prepares for the failure of this relationship with Guinevere's fundamental failure of perception. Watching by the castle walls to see him pass, she does not recognize the King, "since he neither wore

on helm or shield / The golden symbol of his kinglihood / But rode a simple knight among his knights" (CA 47-51).

The question of Arthur's identity is also of great concern to Guinevere's father, as his petition for her hand in marriage raises Leodogran's doubts about Arthur's origins. "However much" Arthur may have done for the king of Cameliard, he must not give his "one daughter saving to a king, / And a king's son" (CA 141-43). In Leodogran's search for the 'truth' of Arthur's birth, then, the poet sets up the pattern of the quest for 'truth' or 'certainty', which, as we have seen, will run throughout the *Idylls*.

Since his own counsellors can not tell him "the secret of . . . Arthur's birth" (CA 158), the King questions Arthur's emissaries, Ulfius, Brastias, and Bedivere, but even he, "the first of all his knights" only adds to the doubts and confusion. Leodogran must determine whether Arthur, crowned by "Merlin through his craft" is "the child of shamefulness", sired by Uther, "Or born the son of Gorlois, after death," or even "the son of Anton, and no king" (CA 230-41).

A more satisfying account of Arthur's history is supplied by Bellicent, "Daughter of Gorlois and Ygerne" (CA 315), who knew him as a child. Arthur's identity as King and ideal leader is most firmly established in her account of his foundation of the Order. Describing the powerful impact of his "great authority" as he bound his knights "by so strait vows to his own self," Bellicent recalls that

... when he spake and cheered his Round Table
With large, divine, and comfortable words,
... [she] beheld
From eye to eye through all their Order flash
A momentary likeness of the King: (CA 266-70)

After offering this most convincing testimony to Arthur's kingship, however, Bellicent goes on to relate the legendary tale of his descent "from the great deep"

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(CA 358-410), which, while suggesting the spiritual nature of this ideal leader, once more surrounds his origins with mystery.

In the end, Leodogran's doubts are resolved and his decision based, not on any 'material' evidence, but on his own vision. The truth is revealed to Leodogran in a dream which both forecasts the doomed course of Arthur's rule (CA 427-39), and confirms his identity, as the thick haze and confusion obscuring "the phantom king" suddenly disappears to disclose a clear image of "the King . . . in heaven, / Crowned" (CA 440-43).

With the ceremony which then concludes "The Coming of Arthur", Tennyson reasserts the association of the King's marriage with the foundation of his Order. "Glorying in their vows and him, his knights / Stood round him, and rejoicing in his joy", as they celebrate the union of Arthur and Guinevere, "The fair beginners of a nobler time" (CA 456-58).

The main purpose of the poet's prologue is to set in place the controlling themes of the *Idylls of the King*. In portraying the construction of the Arthurian realm, Tennyson at once illustrates its strength and foreshadows its decline, with his presentation of Arthur's role as leader and the importance of his marriage. The ideal quality of Arthur's leadership is made apparent in the inspiring effect he has upon his knights, but at the same time, through the persistent questioning of his right to rule, posed by the objections of his rivals, and in Leodogran's dilemma, Tennyson prepares for the doubts which will re-surface later to erode the King's authority, for example, in "The Last Tournament" 676-84. Similarly, his treatment of Arthur's marriage includes the critical failure which will lead to its breakdown.

While the effect of "The Coming of Arthur" as an introduction to the *Idylls* is more functional than imaginative, the imaginative power of "The Passing of Arthur", which the poet developed from the "Morte d'Arthur", creates a most

moving conclusion for his Arthurian cycle. In his first treatment of the final break-up of the Order, Tennyson had concentrated on the relationship of the dying King and Sir Bedivere, the last of his knights. By rendering the terrible loss through Bedivere's experience:

Ah! my lord Arthur, whither shall I go?
Where shall I hide my forehead and my eyes?
For now I see the true old times are dead,
....
... now the whole Round Table is dissolved
Which was an image of the mighty world,
And I, the last, go forth companionless,
And the days darken round me, and the years
Among new men, strange faces, other minds.
("Morte d'Arthur" 227-38; PA 395-406)

Tennyson had expressed his own enormous personal grief and the sense of alienation which had been tragically crystallized by the shock of Arthur Hallam's death.

The additions which the poet made to the "Morte" in 1869 (PA 1-169 and 441-69), to create "The Passing of Arthur", were designed both to intensify the emotional mood and to expand the personal focus of the tragedy, in accordance with the wider scope of the *Idylls of the King*. With his extensive addition to the beginning of the poem, Tennyson completes the development of themes originally articulated in the 'True/False' *Idylls* and provides as well his most powerful vision of the end of the Arthurian realm in the passage depicting "that last weird battle in the west" (PA 79-135).

Tennyson opens "The Passing of Arthur" with the King in a state of despair, and through Arthur's interpretation of his defeat extends the domestic viewpoint he had presented in "Guinevere". The King is here transformed from the stern figure pronouncing judgment—the role which love and duty had compelled him to assume—to despondent human being, seeking to find meaning in the tragic reversal

of his life's work. He initially sees the failure as a condition of this imperfect, fallen world (*PA* 13-17), but then, following out a major theme of the 'True/False' group, regards it in terms of the limitations of human perception, wondering

... if the world were wholly fair,
But that these eyes of men are dense and dim,
And have not power to see it as it is:
Perchance, because we see it not to the close; (*PA* 18 21)

Later, waking from an ominous dream in which "the ghost of Gawain blown / Along a wandering wind," prophesies his fate, Arthur prepares for the last combat with the forces raised by Modred. With his painful reflection, "The king who fights his people fights himself" (*PA* 72), Tennyson's theme of the divided self advances to its sorrowful conclusion. This battle, which brings Arthur "To war against [his] people and [his] knights" (*PA* 71), will be the poet's final dramatization of the division within, which, as we observed, had so troubled Geraint, Lancelot, and Guinevere, and now effectively destroys the Arthurian civilization.

In the description of the conflict that follows, theme and mood are skilfully fused through the poet's characteristic use of the natural setting. Enlarging the grim landscape of Lyonesse, where he had set the "Morte d'Arthur" (1 12), Tennyson locates the battle at the western edge of the world, in

A land of old upheaven from the abyss
By fire, to sink into the abyss again;
Where fragments of forgotten people dwelt,
And the long mountains ended in a coast
Of ever-shifting sand, and far away
The phantom circle of a moaning sea. (*PA* 82-87)

The "blind haze" through which the King has moved ever since parting from his wife (*PA* 76-78), now becomes

A deathwhite mist . . . over sand and sea:
Whereof the chill, to him who breathed it, drew

Down with his blood, till all his heart was cold
 With formless fear, and even on Arthur fell
 Confusion, since he saw not whom he fought. (PA 95-99)

In this confusion, Arthurian order reverts to chaos.⁵ The very elements effect that fatal loss of identity, which Lancelot once sought, for all the knights are reduced to nameless "shadows in the mist, / And friend slew friend not knowing whom he slew;" (PA 100-01). Finally, as battle and "dolorous day" draw to a close, "A bitter wind, clear from the North" rises to disperse the fog, revealing to Arthur a scene of utter desolation. The only movement on the field of battle now is that of

. . . the wan wave
 [Breaking] in among dead faces, to and fro
 Swaying the helpless hands, and up and down
 Tumbling the hollow helmets of the fallen,
 And shivered brands that once had fought with Rome, (PA 129-35)

Confronting the destruction of his Order, Arthur's own sense of self is almost destroyed: "I know not what I am, / Nor whence I am, nor whether I be King" (PA 144-45), he tells Bedivere, his sole companion. Yet, strengthened by this bold knight's loyalty (PA 147-51), Arthur goes forth to accomplish "one last act of kingship", the slaying of the traitor, Modred (PA 154-69).

The body of the idyll, formed by the "Morte", which, as we noted earlier, was closely based on Malory, deals with the events which mark the completion of Tennyson's Arthurian cycle. After Bedivere at last carries out the King's command to restore the sword, Excalibur, to its mysterious source, the knight bears his dying King to the edge of the lake, where a funeral barge awaits. Accompanied by the three Queens and a throng of "stately forms, / Black-stoled, black-hooded," who raise "an agony / Of lamentation," (PA 364-68), Arthur then departs for "the

⁵ As John Rosenberg notes in *The Fall of Camelot* (89), the account of Arthur's first battle which Tennyson added in 1873 to "The Coming of Arthur" (CA 94-133), emphasized the clarity of the King's vision (CA 95-99), in order to heighten the effect of the blind chaos of his final struggle.

island-valley of Avilion;" to "heal . . . [his] grievous wound" (PA 427-32), leaving Bedivere with those well-known words of consolation:

The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
And God fulfills himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world. (PA 408-10)

At this point, the "Morte" had closed with Bedivere watching "till the hull / Looked one black dot against the verge of dawn, / And on the mere the wailing died away" (PA 438-40). In "The Passing of Arthur", Tennyson added a further passage (PA 441-69), which reinforces the 'open-ended' effect of the "Morte's" conclusion, and at the same time, offers a somewhat stronger suggestion that the cycle is to be perpetuated. The lamentation having ceased, there seems to come "from beyond the limit of the world, / . . . the last echo born of a great cry," which might be some fair city's welcome for "a king returning from his wars" (PA 457-61). As he ascends to a higher vantage point, Bedivere's last sight of the funeral barge is now presented in more hopeful terms, for "the speck that bore the King" appears to "pass on and on, and go / From less to less and vanish into light" (PA 465-68).

The ambiguity of the original ending remains in the equivocal nature of the description of the welcoming cry, and in the poet's suggestion that Bedivere "saw, / . . . / Or thought he saw," (PA 463-65), which qualifies the credibility of the knight's vision. Nevertheless, with the final line of "The Passing of Arthur", Tennyson does offer the promise of renewal: "And the new sun rose bringing the new year" (PA 469).

This conclusion to Tennyson's Arthurian cycle, in fact, prompted further composition. Still developing ideas generated by his reading of Malory several years earlier,⁶ Tennyson proceeded to create the three additional poems which he felt

⁶As previously noted, Lady Tennyson's *Journal* entry for June 23rd, 1859 (135), recorded the poet's interest in Malory's "La Beale Isoude". Furthermore, Hallam Tennyson reports that his parents "read of Sir

were needed to complete the design of the *Idylls of the King*. Even before the publication of *The Holy Grail and Other Poems* at the end of 1869, he had set to work on "Gareth and Lynette", an idyll which would show the realm at its best and thus "improve the sequence of the story between 'The Coming of Arthur' and 'Enid'" (Charles Tennyson 382-83).

Adapting Malory's tale of Sir Gareth, Tennyson presents in his account of the young knight's first quest, the model for chivalric conduct, which, as we have seen, will be reversed by the ill-fated Pelleas. The poet's major addition to his source is a lengthy preamble dealing with Gareth's coming to the court (*GL* 1-430). Tennyson begins by drawing the idealistic character of the youth, who is eager to be made a member of Arthur's Order so that he may undertake "a man's work", which is to "Live pure, speak true, right wrong, follow the King —" (*GL* 115-18). His mother, Bellicent, reluctant to lose the company of her youngest son, finally yields to Gareth's urgent request, but only on the condition that he first 'prove' his love and obedience to her. She insists that Gareth enter Arthur's service disguised as a "kitchen-knave", and spend a full year in lowly "kitchen-vassalage", in the hope that her son's princely pride will keep him at home with her (*GL* 142-60).

It is interesting to discover that the prose draft of "Gareth and Lynette" which appears at the beginning of "Harvard Notebook 40" and is reproduced in "Appendix 4" of David Staines' *Tennyson's Camelot* (189-94), gives the disguise scheme a very different purpose. Apparently, the poet had originally intended to characterize Bellicent not as the devoted mother, but as an adulteress who is anxious to find out if her own shame (i.e., her passion for Sir Lamorack) might be "covered" by the greater shame of Guinevere's sin (Staines 190). Thus in this prose version, Bellicent readily agrees to Gareth's wish to go to the court, but insists that he must "mingle

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Gareth in the *Morte d'Arthur* in February, 1861 (*Memoir* 1: 471).

with the thralls of the house" in order to learn the truth of the rumour, which Arthur's knights, who "are sworn to speak no slander" will never divulge (Staines 190).

Watermarked 1863, this plan was obviously shaped by the domestic focus of the 1859 *Idylls*. However, as the evolving vision of the larger work diffused the original emphasis on Guinevere's role, Tennyson altered Bellicent's motive, so that the disguise becomes a test of Gareth's loyalty and love, rather than part of a plot to expose the guilty Queen. Moreover, in his treatment of Gareth's relationship with Lynette, the knight's concealed identity is used to introduce the conflict of appearance v. reality which will be developed in the "Enid" idylls that follow. Offended by the humble status of her appointed champion, the proud Lynette at first refuses to recognize Gareth's noble nature, but the loyal knight's courageous deeds will serve to reveal his 'true' character to her, just as Enid's actions will demonstrate her fidelity to Geraint.

The rest of Tennyson's preface to the quest which forms the main action of the idyll is designed to present a picture of the Arthurian Order flourishing at the beginning of its natural cycle, and includes a vision of Camelot in the spring, from the perspective of the idealistic youth. Gareth's initial view of the "fair city" recalls the 1833 prose sketch of the sacred Mount, "folded in the golden mists of the West" (*Memoir* 2: 122), for as he approaches Camelot, he sees "Far off. . . the silver-misty morn / Rolling her smoke about the Royal mount," (*GL* 186-87). The poet, moreover, uses the detail of the morning mist to evoke the evanescent, illusory quality of this magical "city . . . built / To music," (*GL* 272-73), describing how

At times the summit of the high city flashed;
 At times the spires and turrets half-way down
 Pricked through the mist; at times the great gate
                   shone
 Only, that opened on the field below:
 Anon, the whole fair city had disappeared.   (*GL* 189-93)

After an encounter with Merlin, who prepares the youth for the 'impossible' demands of the Arthurian vows (*GL* 248-87), Gareth arrives at the court to witness the King, himself, dispensing justice. These demonstrations of the King's fair yet rigorous exercise of his authority (*GL* 326-430), were invented by the poet to illustrate the healthy state of the realm which precedes that stagnation suggested in "Geraint and Enid", when Arthur must reproach himself for having "wrought too long with delegated hands," (*GE* 892).

Begun in October, 1869, "Gareth and Lynette" was not finished until nearly three years later (July, 1872). The body of the poem, relating Gareth's quest to rescue Lynette's sister, involved a great deal of dialogue, which the poet claimed he found difficult to handle (noted in *Memoir* 2: 113). Putting this idyll aside, then, Tennyson returned in November, 1870 to that stage of the Arthurian civilization which had always most engaged his imagination.

In "The Last Tournament", his highly original treatment of the autumn of the realm, the poet skilfully interweaves three events to portray the further decline of fidelity to the vows which took place after the "Pelleas and Ettarre" episode.

"The Tournament of the Dead Innocence", heralded by "One low roll / Of Autumn thunder," (*LT* 152-53), is a melancholy mockery of former glorious contests of chivalric skill. Appointed to "arbitrate the field" in Arthur's absence (*LT* 103-04), Lancelot wearily observes the rules of the jousts broken without comment, and unhappily concedes the prize—a ruby carcanet, intended for "the purest" of Arthur's knights (*LT* 49-50)—to his great rival, the faithless Tristram. Meanwhile,

the King conducts an expedition to purge the realm of those "renegades, / Thieves, bandits" (*LT* 94-95), whom Pelleas, as the "Red Knight", has rallied at his "Round Table in the North". This campaign, as we have already observed, degenerates into a bloody massacre which offers an even more sinister travesty of Arthurian action than that represented by "The Tournament of the Dead Innocence".

Providing the structural link between these two incidents is the champion of "The Last Tournament". In his account of the journey which follows Tristram's victory at the jousts, the poet connects the knight's vivid dream of emotional conflict (*LT* 406-18) with the equally vivid description of the massacre (*LT* 419-85). Moreover, through his imaginative characterization of Tristram, Tennyson expands his analysis of the disintegration of Arthur's Order.

A substantial portion of Malory's *Works* (VIII-XII 229-511) had been devoted to his portrait of the great knight of "Lyones", whose chivalric prowess was described as second only to that of his close friend, "sir Launcelot". While Tennyson retains the key characteristics contained in his medieval source, (i.e., Tristram's personal charm and association with Lancelot, as well as his skills in jousting, hunting, and harping), the poet alters the knight's role dramatically, creating from Malory's heroic adventurer an amoral opportunist.

Turning Tristram's friendship with Lancelot into a rivalry (*LT* 177-83), Tennyson uses the similarity of their situations to point up the essential difference between these "brother" knights. Like Lancelot, Tristram is involved in a liaison with his liege's wife, but his easy acceptance of the affair (*LT* 203-04) contrasts sharply with the spiritual agony suffered by Lancelot. Tristram is undisturbed and undivided by any moral considerations in his multiple betrayals of his king, his wife, and his mistress.

Presenting "Sir Tristram of the Woods" as "armoured all in forest green," (*LT*

170-77), Tennyson identifies the popular champion as another figure allied with the forces of Nature. An expert woodsman, Tristram is most at home in the forest, having lived for a time with his lover in a "woodland paradise" (*LT* 375-80, 720), and composing "in the woods" his lyric celebrating "free love" (*LT* 275-81). In fact, this skilled hunter, "through ever harrying [the] wild beasts—" has himself "grown wild beast" (*LT* 630-32), and with Tristram's attitude towards his Arthurian vows, Tennyson provides additional insight into the deterioration of the realm.

During his reconciliation with Isolt, Tristram offers his own explanation for the failure of the vows. After acknowledging his initial response to the King, who "seemed to [him] no man, / But Michaël trampling Satan;" (*LT* 667-68), Tristram goes on to define the value of the Arthurian vows:

They served their use, their time; for every knight
 . . .
 . . .
 . . . being lifted up beyond himself,
 Did mightier deeds than elsewhere he had done,
 And so the realm was made; . . . (*LT* 671-76)

Tristram, however, had joined the Order at that period when the original sense of noble purpose was already diminishing: "the heathen wars were o'er, / The life had flown," (*LT* 269-70). Consequently, when doubts arose regarding Arthur's authority, questioning his right to impose such a strict code on the members of his Round Table, Tristram, like many of his fellows, had simply abandoned the vows (*LT* 676-83). Expressing the rationalistic view which undermines Arthurian idealism, Tristram refuses to be bound by such "inviolable vows / Which flesh and blood perforce would violate" (*LT* 683-84).

While remaining a knight of the Order, then, Tristram bases his conduct on his own 'natural' instincts, rather than adhering to the King's laws. A "worldling of the world" (*LT* 691), who denies the life of the spirit, Tristram follows the naturalist

philosophy that represents a major source of disorder in the realm. Ironically, moreover, Tristram, himself falls victim to the violence which follows from the abandonment of the Arthurian ideals. Betrayal is added to betrayal in the powerful conclusion to "The Last Tournament", as passion culminates in murder.

Completed in May, 1871, "The Last Tournament" was printed in the December issue of the *Contemporary Review*, and then republished with "Gareth and Lynette" in 1872 (*Memoir* 2: 104, 126). The following year, Tennyson published the *Idylls of the King* in their new order, making "Gareth and Lynette" the first of "The Round Table" episodes, and placing "The Last Tournament" between "Pelleas and Ettarre" and "Guinevere". With the inclusion of these pictures of the spring and 'fall' of the Order, Tennyson's Arthurian cycle might now be considered to be complete. The poet, however, decided that "Merlin and Vivien" appeared in the series "far too soon" (quoted in Staines 135), and so moved back to the mid-point of the *opus* to compose his final idyll.

Returning to the theme of the divided self in "Balin and Balan", Tennyson transformed Malbry's tale of fratricide ("The Knight with the Two Swords" II 37-59) into his most explicit rendering of the fatal conflict within. Dominated by the vicious effect of slander, the action of this poem is designed to introduce "the wily Vivien" into the realm, and also to reverse the "change of heart" pattern with which "Geraint and Enid" had concluded.

The idyll begins as Balin, "the Savage", having been banished by the King for three years because of his brutal attack on a thrall who had "spoken evil" of him, is re-admitted to the court. At the same time his twin brother, Balan, who represents the 'civilized' side of this ferocious character, is received into Arthur's Order. Immediately undertaking a quest to hunt the "demon of the woods"—an embodiment of the spirit of slander (*BB* 121-28)—Balan urges Balin, who is to

remain at court, to overcome his delusions and mad outbursts, so that he may also become a worthy member of the Arthurian fellowship (*BB* 136-49).

Separated from the brother who had always served to control his violent, self-destructive impulses, Balin must achieve personal order on his own. Accordingly, like Edyrn, reforming "After a life of violence," (*GE* 912), he attempts to work a "change of heart" (*GE* 898), by learning "what Arthur meant by courtesy, / Manhood, and knighthood," (*BB* 155-56). However, while Edyrn had received instruction from Dubric, the high priest, Balin unfortunately chooses Lancelot for his model.

Balin, whose desperate energies had been better spent in battle (*BB* 172-75), is fundamentally unsuited to the practice of Camelot's "high-set courtesies" (*BB* 222). Nevertheless, he struggles to emulate Lancelot's "worship of the Queen", regarding theirs as the ideal chivalric relationship (*BB* 175-81). Thus, when he overhears an intimate conversation between Guinevere and her gentle knight (*BB* 235-75), Balin is horrified by the implications of the scene. Believing, however, that he is still suffering from some fiendish hallucination ("but I see not what I see. / . . . hear not what I hear" (*BB* 276-77), which is the product of his own unworthiness, Balin flees the court.

"Mad for strange adventure", he follows his brother's track which leads into the dangerous territory of King Pellam (*BB* 284-85). Corruption thrives in this domain, for in his pursuit of religious glory, Pellam has surrendered the management of the realm to his heir, the evil Garlon. After a furious journey through a forest full of menace (*BB* 304-25), Balin arrives at the castle, which, as we have noticed, displays the ruinous effects of Pellam's withdrawal from his appointed duties (*BB* 326-31). There, "in the low dark hall of banquet", which is surrounded by the threatening presence of Nature (*BB* 338-41), Balin's encounter with Garlon further

aggravates the madness originally provoked by the scene in Guinevere's garden.

Poisoned by Garlon's scornful interpretation of Lancelot's "fair wife-worship" (BB 351-56), Balin erupts in passionate fury, and after attacking the accuser, once more flees wildly into the forest. Now, however, Vivien, who is on her way to Camelot, appears in the woods, to complete the disastrous effect of Garlon's slander upon Balin. In an attempt to enlist the woeful creature in her scheme to corrupt the Round Table, Vivien assures Balin that Lancelot and Guinevere are lovers. Offering fabricated evidence of their passion (BB 495-516), Vivien confirms the terrible doubts which had been raised by "that dark bower at Camelot" (BB 518-19).

Vivien's lie unleashes Balin's "evil spirit": in a frenzy he tramples his own shield, defacing the emblem of his allegiance to the Queen, and hurls it away with an unearthly shriek (BB 529-34). Unhappily, "That weird yell", piercing through the forest, summons Balan, who identifies it as "the scream of that Wood-devil [he had come] to quell!" (BB 539). Taking the battered shield as further evidence of wrong-doing, Balan prepares to assault his unknown foe.

Both are mortally wounded in the combat, but Balin is the first to discover the horror he has committed, when, roused by the cool air, he recognizes his dying brother. As the idyll then draws to its tragic close, Balan reveals the truth: Garlon and "the wanton" Vivien, leagued in opposition to Arthur's Order, have foully deceived his unfortunate brother. The affirmation of the Queen's purity here (BB 594-606) is most important, for the poet intends to imply rather than confirm Guinevere's guilt at this point in the cycle, developing the pernicious influence of slander which had previously so distressed Geraint.

With the addition of "Balin and Balan" to the *Idylls of the King* in 1885, the series was at last completed. The lengthy process of composition, in fact, concluded

at the structural centre of the *opus*, where Tennyson had begun almost 20 years before. Moreover, through this study of the 'split personality' in which passion overcomes the voice of reason to end in self-destruction, Tennyson offers his final imaginative vision of the tragic fate of the Arthurian civilization. This also reminds us that "Dreams, madness, doubt, suicide, and death . . . figure as prominently in his later poetry, . . . as in his earlier" (Rosenberg "Tennyson and the Landscape of Consciousness" 305), and thus brings us to the conclusion of our study.

CONCLUSION

Tennyson's life-long imaginative engagement with the Arthurian legend produced a rich and complex *opus*. As, over the course of his poetic development, he responded to the contemporary conception of the poet's role and to the pressures of a time of perplexing change, Tennyson's Arthurian work evolved from a Romantic retreat to a fantasy world, to the vision of a great civilization, tragically destroyed from within.

The first group of *Idylls* composed is central to the completed cycle, for here the myths of the lost Arthurian paradise and its noble King which had marked his original treatments of the material are integrated with the poet's social vision to create the design for the larger work. However, the tendency to categorize Tennyson's poetry in terms of its 'public' or 'private' perspective, as defined by Harold Nicolson, has led commentators to emphasize the domestic/didactic character of the 1859 *Idylls*, and to overlook their connections with the earlier work. In addition, until the recent studies by J.M. Gray, Donald S. Hair, and David Staines, the serial process of composition has served to obscure the relationship of these poems to the completed *Idylls of the King*.

We have found, on the other hand, that the social 'message' of the 'True/False' *Idylls* is deeply rooted in the poet's earlier preoccupations, and is presented through patterns characteristic of his lyric voice. The domestic vision of these poems, in fact, provides a context in which Tennyson continues to develop the psychological tensions and experiences of alienation/estrangement which had generated much of his best lyric poetry. In accordance with his conception of marriage as the model for social relationship, Tennyson sees the breakdown of the marriage relationship as central to and representative of the breakdown in social order in these *Idylls*. Furthermore, the conflict between emotional reality and spiritual ideal which is at

the heart of this critical failure may be read essentially as an extension of the conflict between social and creative experience with which Tennyson's poetic development had begun.

Originally inspired by his profound personal loss, Tennyson's treatment of the dissolution of the Arthurian Order in the 1859 *Idylls* expresses the confusion and anxieties of a society in a state of transition, in which traditional values and beliefs were threatened with tremendous change. Reflecting the pervasive psychological malaise of the time, as well as his own fear of creative paralysis, Tennyson identifies the problem of the divided will as the source of the disintegration process. The poet thus concentrates on the inner lives of the characters he draws from his medieval sources, and adapts the chivalric quest to explore the familiar terrain of his private vision, i.e., the emotional and spiritual wasteland.

The quest continues to provide the pattern for the later *Idylls of the King*, as Tennyson extends his interpretation of the destruction of the realm, working from the themes articulated in the 'True/False' group. The connection of personal order to the health of society previously established is reaffirmed in the later poems which show that the strength or weakness of the Arthurian Order depends upon the exercise of the individual will. However, while the effect of 'true/false' love as a strengthening/debilitating influence upon the will had dominated the 1859 *Idylls*, Tennyson now expands his vision of the factors affecting the knights' fidelity to their King's noble purpose. In the *Idylls* added in 1869, 1872, and 1885, the disastrous consequences of individual responses to false ideals, betrayal, doubt, and slander, work to precipitate the disintegration process.

As we have followed the course of Tennyson's Arthurian quest, we have found that his vision of the realm in the *Idylls of the King* unfolded in a cyclical fashion, beginning and ending precisely at the mid-point of the work. The circular nature

of the composition process was in part determined by Tennyson's use of the natural cycle to portray the various stages of the Order's history. Most important for our purposes, however, is the creative impulse which inspired the poet to return to the structural and imaginative heart of the work for his last idyll, to compose his final and most dramatic treatment of the problem of the divided self.

We have seen, then, that the conflicts of Tennyson's earlier work remain unresolved in his later poetry, and from this study of his Arthurian *opus* in relation to his poetic development, we may conclude that Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* offer his fullest and most sustained treatment of the fatal division within, thus presenting a social message shaped by the poet's private vision.

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