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A STUDY OF TENNYSON'S IDYLLS OF THE KING

by

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THESIS

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"So spake the King: I knew not all he meant."

(The Holy Grail, 916)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

This thesis is a study of themes and genre in Tennyson's Idylls of the King. I have not attempted to present a survey of the body of critisicm on the cycle, nor have I attempted a comprehensive comparison of the poem with any of Tennyson's sources.

The first chapter is based on A. Fowler's study of genres and I follow the implications of his work in my reading of the Idylls.

Tennyson blends various generic strands in his cycle, in particular allegory, epic, dramatic monologue and the Alexandrian idyll, to create a complex psychological allegory of epic scope which both draws on traditional genres and extends them.

I believe the Idylls should be read as a cycle and in the order in which Tennyson finally presented them; the ordering process is as much part of the creative process as the actual act of composition. I have adopted Priestley's sensible division of the twelve poems which he says "falls naturally into three groups of four, corresponding closely to the three acts of modern drama" (1960, p.252-254).

The second chapter begins the sequential examination of the first four "spring" and "summer" poems beginning with the symbolic The Coming of Arthur. This idyll begins Tennyson's Arthurian mythopoeia, creating a poetic kingdom of the mind. The "act" closes with the Geraint and Enid idylls, all four works in this section ending happily.

The third chapter deals with the idylls which plot the corrupting and ever-widening influence of the adulterous relationship of Lancelot and Guinevere, one cause of the destruction of the institution of the Round Table. Other causes of the demise of Arthur's order are the pernicious influences of the evil Vivien and Modred and the meaningless and sterile spirituality that prompts the quest of The Holy Grail.

The last four idylls chart the final collapse of Arthur's realm, the utter disillusionment of individual idealism - personified by Pelleas, an anachronistic spring figure who appears in Camelot's bleak and hostile winter - and the complete social decay which is demonstrated by the fiasco of The Last Tournament. The tragic denouement of the cycle, on both individual and social levels, is evident in Guinevere, in which Arthur's wretched and traitorous queen understands Arthur's vision, but too late to save Camelot from ruin. In the final framing idyll, The Passing of Arthur,

Tennyson's myth is elevated to the level of universal significance, the Idylls of the King becoming "not the history of one man or one generation but of a whole cycle of generations" (Memoir, ii, p.127).

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A NOTE ON THE TEXT

All references to Tennyson's poetry are from The Poems of Tennyson, edited by Christopher Ricks (1987, Longman, 2nd edition in 3 vols), and cited in the text as "Ricks". When no volume number follows the name, the reference is to the third volume containing Idylls of the King.

When making cross-references I have used the following abbreviations:

CA : The Coming of Arthur

GL : Gareth and Lynette

MG : The Marriage of Geraint

GE : Geraint and Enid

BB : Balin and Balan

MV : Merlin and Vivien

LE : Lancelot and Elaine

HG : The Holy Grail

PE : Pelleas and Ettarre

LT : The Last Tournament

G : Guinevere

PA : The Passing of Arthur

I have deliberately avoided the use of footnotes and endnotes and used parentheses where necessary.

In matters of presentation I have in general adopted the convention prescribed in the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers (1984, New York: Modern Language Association).

References in the text are incorporated without the date or publication details which may be found in the bibliography. In cases of more than one item by the same author - which applies to J.M. Gray and F.E.L. Priestley - ambiguity has been eliminated by including the date of publication in my textual reference. In the case of Hallam Tennyson's 1897 work, Memoir is used.

CHAPTER ONE

Genre in the Idylls

Establishing the genre of the Idylls is not only the recent critic's problem. Among other near-contemporary critics, Hallam Tennyson identified the cycle as an epic poem. Tennyson himself disapproved of this and used **idyll** for **idyl** to denote a new kind of idyl. Edmund Lushington suggested the title Epylls of the King (which Tennyson rejected because he did not like the sound of the word **Epyll**) (Ricks, p.255-262). More recently Linda Hughes (among others) categorises the Idylls as a series of dramatic monologues; others call the poems **Epyllia**, "little epics". Pattison sees them as belonging to the Idyll genre, and McLuhan, attempting to be more specific, declares that the poems are a certain type of idyll: an Alexandrian idyll. Still others, too numerous to mention, call this Arthuriad a disjointed narrative poem. The allegory of the poem is often spoken of, or what Tennyson himself preferred to call "the parabolic drift". The cycle is tragic, contains lyric elements and has, I believe, a cohesive thematic development. How then, do we make some sense of this enormously varied generic mishmash, and is it in our interest to do so?

Much of the following discussion of the value or necessity of discovering the genre of poems comes from Alastair Fowler's book, Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes (1982). Fowler begins with the premise that every work of literature belongs to at least one genre (or kind) and by understanding what this kind is "the author communicates...much as the speaker might express himself, by a system of shared but more-or-less unconscious and unformulated grammatical rules" (p.20). Genre, continues Fowler, is not merely an instrument of classification and prescription, but also an agent of meaning; it is the most important literary code. It provides a literary context and reinforces the signal system with additional coding rules. Every convention the writer uses - repetition, refrains, thematic parallels, sense emphasised by sound and rhythm - bears upon the meaning of the text. For instance it is significant that Tennyson chooses blank verse, the standard metre for epic discourse in his day, as the metre of his Idylls. By using this formal code, the epic quality of the Idylls is communicated.

Fowler goes further than this. He says that "to have any artistic

significance, to mean anything distinctive in a literary way, a work must modulate or vary or depart from its generic conventions, and consequently alter them for the future" (p.23). This may sound contradictory in some ways. Thus Fowler is first of all saying that a literary work must belong to at least one specific genre, and secondly that to have any artistic significance, it must differ in some way from its specific genre or genres; it must be innovative and unique. What I understand Fowler to be saying is that a genre is not a static and therefore sterile code, but a code constantly rejuvenating itself and developing on its generic foundations. Kinds of literature arise phoenix-like and in greater splendour from the ashes of other kinds or groups of kinds.

This would be true of all works, regardless of greatness, or of the genius of the author, since even in the most humble of works conventions are established, as familiar and unambiguous, or perhaps as hackneyed and over-stylized. The important point is that all genres are continuously undergoing metamorphosis and this is the principal way, continues Fowler, in which literature itself changes. Even those who conscientiously ignore genre adopt a coded meaning, a boundary, as E.D. Hirsch (quoted by Fowler, p.24) calls it. This may be nothing more than the conventions of their time - custom and fashion.

Following naturally from this, it is clear that genre need be neither inhibiting nor overly prescriptive, and one need go no further than Tennyson or the poet Laureate he succeeded, Wordsworth, to discover this. In spite of ambitious experimentation on the part of both these poets, and numerous other poets, complete liberation from genres has never actually taken place, since if it had, literature, and indeed communication, would cease. As Fowler says, "At the very least, they [experimental writers] have to know what rules are worth breaking" (p.32). It is genre as communication that Fowler has in mind when he calls this generic study "more of a pigeon than a pigeon-hole", since the classification of kinds is less for classification than for communication and interpretation. To discover the genre (or generic blends) of a work is, to a great extent, to discover its meaning.

It is appropriate that Fowler calls genre a coded meaning since generic operations are partly unconscious. The conventions of comedy are not all held in mind when one reads comedy, yet one is aware that what one

confronts is comedy, not a work of tragedy, or a lyric or any other distinct kind (although there may be elements of all these genres in any given work). It is difficult, sometimes impossible, adequately to formulate what a particular genre is. Idylls of the King is a case in point. One is aware of different generic strands blending, but this changing and adapting of the various genres broadens the work, rendering definition of the poetic kind difficult.

Dr. Johnson recognised this when he wrote:

> ...Definitions have been no less difficult or uncertain in criticism than in law. Imagination, a licentious and vagrant faculty, unsusceptible of limitations, and impatient of restraint, has always endeavoured to baffle the logician, to perplex the confines of distinction, and burst the inclosures of regularity. There is therefore scarcely any species of writing, of which we can tell what is its essence, and what are its constituents; every new genius produces some innovation, which when invented and approved, subverts the rules which the practice of foregoing authors had established.
> (Fowler, p.42).

How then can a reader generically classify any work? Fowler's solution is to adopt Wittgenstein's linguistic "family resemblances" which would, broadly speaking, give some indication of how any literary work could be classified. This is done by noticing:

1. authorial statements showing a conscious choosing of a genre;
2. contemporary practice which would give some indication of the current generic paradigm;
3. early readers' comments which would, to some extent,indicate both of the above; and
4. by making indirect constructive inference which is not definitive but subject to change with each changing paradigm. Besides this, Austin Warren advocates basing one's judgements on "substantive, formal features", upon, he continues "both outer form (specific metre or structure)...and upon inner form (attitude, tone, purpose - more crudely, subject and audience)" (Fowler, p.55).

The next question that must be asked is: if a work differs from its generic conventions (as some will obviously do), how do these changes take place? Fowler (p.190) gives a list of reasons for generic change: topical invention, combination, aggregation, change of scale, change of function, counterstatement, inclusion, a selection of generic mixture and the creation of hybrids in which there are two or more generic repertoires present in such proportions that none of them dominates. Modulation

(generic blending or adaptation) is another means of change, and is probably the most interesting with regard to Tennyson's Idylls of the King. It involves the blending of styles so that "the poetic convention of one style" becomes "the poetic resource of all styles" (p.191). This does not create a complete literary amalgam (were this possible, which I do not think is the case). Each genre retains its own identity and distinguishing features, and must do so to make any meaningful contribution to the work.

The generic paradigm should not, however, be seen as a deterministic system stifling creative impulse and individuality. The various options for generic change that Fowler has pointed out make variety, and the opportunity for original and creative contributions, almost limitless.

Fowler concludes his argument by mentioning that "in reception genre operates in at least three ways, corresponding to logical phases of criticism - construction, interpretation and evaluation" (p.256). Construction involves signals which are originally sent: a literary work conforming, more or less, to various, historic, generic conventions, using diverse structures, innovations, patterns or variations. Interpretation is the practice of the reader, and as such transcends paradigms. Just as complex and involving just as many value judgements is evaluation, which entails rank-orderings of genres according to the generic paradigm which alters from age to age, every period having its own "high genres" even if these preferences remain unargued. (One thinks of the many and various attempts to write an epic on the grounds of its being regarded as the most ambitious of genres.) Evaluation is not, however, beyond or above history, but incorporates past generic paradigms, either assimilated or rejected. Some aspects of evaluation are unaffected by paradigmatic shifts, continues Fowler. A writer who chooses a "higher genre" of his own time is greater, to that extent, than a writer who opts for what he sees as a less demanding genre. Of course, this individual writer's aspirations to modify the genre must also be considered.

Having said this, the way is, I think, clear to examine what Tennyson and some of his critics have to say about the genre of the Idylls of the King, to look at the idyll genre and its developments, at how Tennyson used it, at other genres reflected in the cycle, and to examine what genre or generic modulation means in our reading of the Idylls.

Hallam Tennyson said in his Memoir that when one looked for epic unity in the Idylls, it could be found "in the unending war of humanity in all ages - the world-wide war of sense and soul typified in individuals" (II,p.127-28). He seems quite unequivocal about the genre of the Idylls. He tells how he found a fragment of a epic poem (probably written about 1833) and notes that his father was prevented from doing his "Arthur Epic", in twelve books, by John Sterling's review of the early Idylls in the Quarterly (Sept. 1842). He quotes his father: "I had it all in my mind, could have done it without any trouble. But then I thought that a small vessel, built on fine lines, is likely to float further down the stream of Time than a big raft" (Ricks, p.255).

The cycle, however, fulfils many of the criteria demanded for its inclusion in the most ambitious of all genres, epic. Abrams writes that an epic is a long narrative poem on a great and serious subject with an heroic or even "quasi-divine" (p.51) figure at the centre, on whose actions depend the fate of his nation. This figure should have the widest significance. In Tennyson's poem, Arthur, a national hero, becomes a universal figure of goodness and a champion of all that is right. The epic poem, again according to Abrams, must be a "ceremonial performance" (p.51), distanced from ordinary speech and having proportional formality of heroic subject using various epic conventions, one of the important ones being, in this case, that the narrative concentrates on specific and significant episodes; and although this is true of all narrative, it is particularly noticeable in the Idylls. Priestley, noticing the epic allusions in the Idylls, says that "it is easy to assume a connection with the epic, and to judge the poem by 'rules' or conventions of the traditional epic, coming to the natural conclusion that Tennyson wished to write an epic but was not equal to the task" (p.239).

Another fact confusing some critics is that Tennyson uses various sources, among them Malory. It is then supposed that his intention is merely to versify or paraphrase in blank verse what has already been done. Lucas, among several others who do not understand the genre of the Idylls , dismisses the cycle because it fails as an epic. He claims that the Idylls

> have no epic quality; their very name betrays them - Malory made into 'idylls!' - The spear of Malory's Lancelot twisted into a china shepherd's

> crook! In short, this highly coloured fowl which the Victorians thought a bird of paradise, turns out to have been only a parrot after all. (p.6)

"The Epic", an introduction to the "Morte d'Arthur", written after 1835 and, interestingly, published among the "English Idyls", hints at Tennyson's ambitions for an epic on King Arthur. But Abrams also allows a looser application of the term epic: a work which does not necessarily exhibit an argument or have an epic question asked, or have the traditional formal catalogue of central figures, but which does aspire to the epic in terms of scale, scope, or the "profound human importance of its subjects" (p.52).

Pattison, whose argument I shall look at later in the chapter in connection with my discussion of the idyll kind, sees Tennyson leaning heavily on the epic tradition in an attempt to establish unity in the human community and the forces governing it. From this epic heritage Tennyson borrowed (using the idyll form) epic metre and the epic claim to universality.

Important to notice is that Tennyson managed to manipulate the final edition of the Idylls so that there was an epic structure maintained, with twelve books, a number connected, according to McLuhan, with the twelve astrological houses (p.xix). I could find little or no evidence for this thesis, but there is clearly a cyclical, seasonal theme, giving unity, at least on that level, to the poems.

However, according to Tennyson's notes for 1833, he was thinking along certain specific allegorical lines. King Arthur was to represent religious doubt. Of the two Queen Guineveres originally projected, the first was to represent primary Christianity, and the second Roman Catholicism (Ricks,p.256). Modred was to stand for sceptical understanding, Merlin Emrys, the enchanter, was to represent science, Excalibur war, and the Round Table liberal institutions. Even though these ideas changed, Tennyson himself allowed critics to think of the poems as naive allegory. Both Dean Alford and J.T. Knowles followed the allegorical significance vigorously. Dean Alford wrote: "Of course Camelot, for instance, a city of shadowy palaces, is everywhere symbolic of the gradual growth of human beliefs and institutions, and of the spiritual development of man" (Ricks, p.258). Yet the simple narrative was not forgotten. Alford continues: "Yet there is no single fact

or incident in the Idylls, however seemingly mystical, which cannot be explained as without any mystery or allegory whatever" (Ricks, p.258). But when the Bishop of Ripon, Boyd Carpenter, asked Tennyson if the three mysterious queens who appear from time to time are "Faith, Hope and Charity", Tennyson replied: "They mean that and they do not. They are three of the noblest of women. They are also those three graces, but they are much more. I hate to be tied down to say, 'this means that,' because the thought within the image is much more than any one interpretation" (Ricks, p.258).

To interpret the Idylls as a naive allegorical poem would be to limit it. Tennyson complained: "They have taken my hobby and ridden it too hard, and they have explained some things too allegorically, although there is an allegorical or perhaps rather parabolic drift in the poem" (Ricks, p.258). In one of the poems there is an allegory against allegory. Gareth and Lynette sees the idealistic spring figure of Gareth on a quest to rescue a noblewoman, Lyonors, who is besieged by four brothers who have each adopted an allegorical persona taken from a rock-carving by a hermit showing "The war of Time against the soul of man" (1168). The climax of the allegory within the parabolic drift comes when, from out of the garb of the ghastly figure of Death, springs "the bright face of a blooming boy / Fresh as a flower new-born" (1373-1374). Gareth, although relieved at his defeat of "Death", is indignant at the allegorical disguise. He says to the frightful skeleton figure before their confrontation:

> Fool, for thou hast, men say, the strength of ten,
> Canst thou not trust the limbs thy God hath given,
> But must, to make the terror of thee more,
> Trick thyself out in ghastly imageries
> Of that which life hath done with and the clod,
> Less dull than thou, will hide with mantling flowers
> As if for pity?
>
> (1352-1358).

In spite of this not very favourable portrayal of the "trickery" of allegorical disguise, Tennyson does make use of it as a literary device, but in conjunction with several others. That he felt the restraint of allegory and realised the danger of making his poem too much like a message and not enough like a work of literature, is evident, since he changed Arthur from a figure representing religious doubt to a far more hazy figure representing "The Ideal Soul of Man" (Ricks, p.259).

Worth examining in greater detail is Tennyson's distinction between allegory and parable. In naive allegory there is usually a direct and simple correspondence between the thing allegorized and its representational character (or thing). In one episode of The Pilgrim's Progress, for example, the helpful Interpreter can point out to the reader the precise and specific meaning of the allegorical characters or incidents. Parable does not have this specific one-to-one correspondence, and is consequently much broader and more flexible in its meanings than naive allegory of the kind Tennyson originally had in mind for his generic framework. (Clearly great works like The Faerie Queene, The Divine Comedy, Piers Plowman, The Pardoner's Tale and The Pilgrim's Progress have the subtlety and range of any other poetic kind.) In short: great allegory is never naive allegory.

F.E.L Priestley sees the Idylls operating on three levels: individual, social and universal. On the universal level, the aforementioned "Ideal Soul" comes into contact with the warring elements of the flesh. The Idylls then are, as Tennyson said, "not the history of one man or of one generation but of a whole cycle of generations" (Ricks, p.258). Arthur, the Ideal Soul, is also the soul of any society or social organism, the animating principles and ideas on which the life of a society depends; Arthur being also the individual soul of mankind. These levels imply both epic and allegorical functioning and indicate generic modulation since both kinds retain their distinguishing features.

In the same way, says Priestley, the Round Table signifies order: individual, social and universally human order, created by the ideas and values Arthur personifies. It is an "image of the mighty world" (Ricks, p.258), the cosmic creating spirit which animates and gives order to the societal microcosms of individual man, society or nation, which, Priestley claims, Tennyson recognises as needing to be shaped and animated by various manifestations of this eternal and unchanging spirit.

As representative of naive allegory we would be bound to see the Idylls as a poetic failure - unless seen on the most superficial of levels. If we view it as parable, however, with Arthur's kingdom signifying all social structures and Arthur representing all men who war against the flesh, a web of

complexity becomes apparent, making nonsense of the charge of superficiality. The price is, however, a bewildering range of possible meanings.

Sensibly, Priestley offers a way out. He says that the general pattern is quite clear: the primary attention is focused on The Coming and The Passing of Arthur, the various other patterns coming into and out of view "for varied lengths of time and with varied degrees of force" (p.130). These other patterns are themselves parables, relating to the whole meaning of the main parable and connected by the narrative structure:

> The realistic narratives provide illustrations or exempla of the more abstract or universal theme presented in the allegory; the allegory presents a general or universal comment on the significance of the realistic particular narrative.
>
> (p.130)

But this parabolic thread is only one generic thread of Tennyson's "shot-silk with many glancing colours" (Ricks, p.258). Priestley sees "the wide range of choice open to Tennyson through the use of the loosely defined 'idyll' form, allow[ing] him to create a dramatic parable of enormous variety, richness, complexity, while retaining the strong and relatively simple shape of tragedy" (Priestley, p.136).

Tennyson gives very little explicit indication as to why he chose the title "**Idylls**" for his Arthuriad. Theodore Watts reported: "Tennyson does not approve of my calling the Idylls an epic. Thinks the Idylls more original. Used Idylls for Idylls to denote a new kind of idyl" (Ricks, p.262). Whether Watts is guilty of misreporting Tennyson, or whether he interprets his information incorrectly, is uncertain, but whatever the reason, Watts is wrong. Idyll is not a new form at all and Tennyson was perfectly aware of this. Hallam Tennyson also seems vague about the idyll kind. He mentions the difference between idyll and idyl as being a difference of length only, and this cannot be right since Enoch Arden, an "English Idyl", is of a similar length to the individual idylls.

Robert Pattison in Tennyson and Tradition spends considerable time tracing the development of the idyll from Greece to Rome (chaps. 2 and 3) and then at the hands of the English poets (chap.4) (although, Pattison notes, there was no clear English tradition on which Tennyson could draw). The idyll form, as Pattison points out, is an experimental medium, a plastic source to be

moulded, since there is no real rigorous definition of the idyll as a generic form. Pattison notes that some of the poems Tennyson calls idyll may also be classified as dramatic monologue, dialogue, epyllion, eidyllion, elegy, satire or lyric. It spite of the lack of rigorous definition, however, the idyll kind does have clear characteristics that distinguish it from others, allowing other, subsidiary kinds to exist under its umbrella.

According to Pattison, idyll comes from **eidyllion**, which either may mean "little picture", or may reflect an interest in poetic structure, since the word from which it comes is **eidos** which means shape, form, figure, and so is a suitable kind to capture the Alexandrian preoccupation with genre and poetic form.

Pattison, in spite of the variations of idyll kind as displayed by examples from Theocritus and Callimachus, manages to define the idyll in terms of two characteristics: self-consciousness and eclecticism. The Alexandrian poets, coming from a strong academic background, were aware of establishing new conventions and went about it with scholarly zeal and precision of detail which swiftly became part of the idyll tradition.

The traditional idyll uses framing devices to achieve distance between the poet and his audience, so that the poetry is ostensibly unemotional and often seemingly cold and passionless. This tradition the Alexandrians would expect their readers to know. Pattison continues by saying that this kind is, to some extent, an amalgam of the primary kinds of literature prior to the Hellenistic period.

The pschological aspect of the idyll genre is of primary interest to Tennyson. Because the kind excludes closure and judgment, being "cold and passionless", it is the perfect medium for poetic psychological exploration.

Myth is manipulated by early idyll writers, one often finding considerable allusion to Homeric myth-making. What were real figures for Homer become for some idyll writers allegorical representations of the mind working under the influence of a ruling passion. The narrative or external Homeric machinery is then used by the idyll writers as the basis of the poetic portrayal of internal, or psychological states, the foundation of western allegory.

At this point it would be helpful to say something about my use of the term

"myth". The term is currently applied by literary critics and scholars with a bewildering variety of meanings. In Tennyson's case the Arthurian mythology he draws on is more legend than myth, since it centres on an historical person rather than a supernatural hero.

In this thesis my use of the term "myth" and "mythopoeia" has to do primarily with Tennyson's poetic construction of an Arthurian world. He does not attempt to portray the historical Arthur but creates a mythology of his own, a literary world existing in a timeless vacuum. Arthur's Camelot is "the city built / To music, therefore never built at all, / And therefore built for ever" (GL 272-274).

In this sense Tennyson's mythopoeia is similar to Blake's, Joyce's in Ulysses and Finnegans Wake, Eliot's in The Waste Land and Yeats's mythology expounded in A Vision and embodied in many of his lyric poems.

Homeric tradition lends to the idyll various epic characteristics including the aspiration to reach universal sweeping conclusions, in spite of the idyll's emphasis on internal psychological/spiritual action rather than external physical action as it is in Homeric epic. And although I would argue that the idyll does have cohesiveness, at least in Tennyson's case, there is fragmentation of the plot which is a poetic representation of the human condition. The idyll kind and the epic kind do overlap in that both search for universals, the epic looking outwards to the human community and the idyll focusing on the individual person - but as a representative psyche, and so seeking generalities.

The idyll uses lyric, as Tennyson does, but also uses various distancing devices to vitiate lyric immediacy. Among these distancing devices is the self-consciously stylised artificiality removing the idyll from the province of realism because, as Pattison puts it, the idyll deals with more than reality; it is not didactic insofar as one is not told what to think, but is rather shown, from a distance, the shape and kind of the psyche. The idyll is a genre of compounded contradictions. Its subject is the heart and yet it derives from a "cold" poetic tradition. Unlike the Homeric epic it deals with the psyche and not with physical action, yet it seeks epic fullness; it is artificial but deals with extreme realism; it has aesthetic appeal in its

artistry but is also "useful" in its psychological penetration.

The Greek idyll form was adapted and changed by the Latin writers, both Ovid and Virgil endeavouring to create a "perpetuum carmen", a continuum of poetry from the earliest times to their own. The Latin idylls all carry the trademarks of the Alexandrian idyll, the eclectic form, the distancing devices, epic proportions and the strong characteristic of allegory. The Roman writers also adapted the pliable idyll kind, making their poems judgmental.

The English tradition of the idyll, as given by Pattison, is interesting. He calls Donne's amatory epistles reawakenings of the idyll kind and gives as other examples of early English idyll Milton's "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso", idyllic examinations of fixed emotional states. Pattison goes on to give Pope's and Gray's pastorals as examples, the eighteenth century characteristically adding a social aspect to what had always been a psychological concern.

During the Romantic period, the lyric "I" jettisoned the artifice of the speaker of the idyll. Linda Hughes sees this as one of the major reasons for Tennyson's choice of the idyll genre: to re-establish a distance between the poet and the speaker. Hughes, however, sees Tennyson's Idylls as dramatic monologues, a position which is quite possible generically, according to Pattison, since he claims that dramatic monologue derives from idyll.

Hughes (p.5-6) offers two schools of thought on what constitutes a dramatic monologue, one exclusive and the other inclusive. The "exclusive" school's definition involves the following characteristics:

1. a speaker other than the poet;
2. the presence (taken for granted) of a responding auditor;
3. a concrete setting adding to the drama of the poem;
4. some degree of dramatic conflict.

The "inclusive" school, in which Hughes classes Pattison and Sinfield, recognizes as a dramatic monologue any poem containing a first person speaker other than the author. This allows much that Langbaum's exclusive approach does not. The entire range that dramatic monologue offers, from sympathy at one end of the spectrum to irony and judgment at the other, is open to

Pattison's group, whereas for Langbaum's the balance would lean more on the side of judgment.

Hughes sees the dramatic monologue as allowing Tennyson a certain freedom due to the dissociation of the self from the speaker, allowing a fusing of the subjective and objective through the poet's assuming the role of another while remaining aware of himself. This would, Hughes continues, offer protection to the essentially private Tennyson, yet allow expression of doubt or endangered faith, hence the frequent pairings of poems and characters, often presenting opposing views. Hughes notes how Tennyson was held up in his progress with the Idylls by the difficulties presented by The Holy Grail, and how these difficulties were overcome by his choosing the dramatic monologue form. (One example being Tennyson's use, in The Holy Grail, of Percivale and Ambrosius as main speaker and auditor.) From this she argues that the dramatic monologue form is integral to all of Tennyson's long poems.

There is, however, one difference, as far as I can make out, between the dramatic monologue and the kind from which it derives, the idyll: namely the greater immediacy of the dramatic monologue. In The Idylls, there are various degrees of immediacy. The Holy Grail has each pronouncement filtered through at least one, and sometimes two, auditors. Many of the more complex Idylls have this filtering device as well as the several other distancing devices already mentioned of with regard to the idyll.

McLuhan sees Tennyson as inspired by the "idyll-epyllion", the names of which he sees as interchangeable, which is not the case, since **epyllion** comes from **epos** (epic) and means "a very brief epic, a narrative poem a few hundred lines long, in hexameters, usually on the subject of the loves of a mythical hero" (Oxford Companion to Classical Literature, p.364). There are connections, however, between the epyllion and the idyll, the former being another sub-genre, and one cultivated by Theocritus. McLuhan quotes Mackail on the idyll as follows:

> Idyllia are cabinet pictures; small in size, highly finished, detachable, not imagined and executed as elements in any large constructive scheme of imaginative decoration, yet each holding its tiny convex mirror up to nature, each bringing art for a moment into relation with one facet or mood of life.
>
> (McLuhan, xx)

Although Tennyson adapted the idyll, J.M. Gray sees him as going back to

the Alexandrian school for his inspiration. Gray quotes what he sees as the formative or meaningful characteristics of the specifically Alexandrian idyll: "ritualistic form, great erudition, artistic sophistication, obscurity, concentration of allusions and expression, discontinuity, flash-backs, digressions, subplots, dramatic parallelism, multilevelled implication and symbolic analogy" (p.1).

All this makes good sense when seen in the context of The Idylls of the King. Tennyson is not using a loose and baggy generic term (in spite of the difficultly of adequately defining it), but one with a specialised and specific history and significance.

One area of particular interest to the genre-hunter is the association of magic with poets in general and with Tennyson in particular, especially in the Idylls. In The Palace of Art, Tennyson asks the question (according to McLuhan): "Is Art a civilised substitute for tribal magic, or is it a refined continuation of tribal magic?" (p.xviii).

For McLuhan the Alexandrian idyll is "a series of pictures with narrative links" which, when suppressed, establish a dramatic mode for the poem: symbolism. This, continues Mc Luhan, "is the art of juxtaposing without links - a riddling art, a magical technique" (p.xviii).

Pattison also refers to the association with magic of the idyll form and its psychological inward-looking:

> The fragmentation of the idyll and its curiosity about inward psychic states, explain the otherwise puzzling recurrence of sorcery as a theme in this form, a recurrence that might have seemed atavistic after Plato and Aristotle. Religion is a unifying social and cultural phenomenon, suitable for epic discussion; its fragmented, individual, self-centred counterpoint is magic.
>
> (Pattison, p.156)

The theme of magic is most noticeable in Gareth and Lynette. Gareth, after arriving with his men at the gates of Arthur's court and seeing the carvings on the gates seeming to writhe, expresses doubt about the reality of Camelot. These doubts are answered by an old man (Merlin) who appears:

> For truly as thou sayest, a Fairy King
> And Fairy Queens have built the city, son;
> They came from out a sacred mountain-cleft
> Toward the sunrise, each with harp in hand,
> And built it to the music of their harps.
> And, as thou sayest, it is enchanted, son,
> For there is nothing in it as it seems
> Saving the King; though some there be that hold

> The King a shadow, and the city real:
> Yet take thou heed of him, for, so thou pass
> Beneath this archway, then wilt thou become
> A thrall to his enchantments...
>
> (GL 254-265)

This is particularly interesting since I see Gareth as a representative of the reader, imaginatively entering Tennyson's poetic myth.

Having spent some time chasing the elusive genre around the walls of Tennyson's Camelot, I have reached the stage when I can call Tennyson's Idylls, idylls. My argument, based on some understanding of the chosen genre, is that Tennyson consciously elected to use and modify an already plastic medium. By building on a framework of symbolic allegory and including lyrics of various forms - sparkling isolated gems used as objects of focus and contemplation - and by maintaining a cyclical epic structure, Tennyson united themes to make one cohesive idyll cycle. As well as this, by using and adapting the stories of other authors within the idyll genre, Tennyson included novelty, subtlety and originality in the creation of a personal and public myth. The clouding of the origin and passing of Arthur allows Tennyson "magically" to create his mythopoeia.

Yet, even in The Idylls, there are marked differences of sub-genre, with one or more of the generic strands emphasised. Hence one can say of The Marriage of Geraint and Geraint and Enid that these idylls are predominantly domestic epics, with a strong thread of allegory. Lancelot and Elaine is a tragic love story with contemplative lyrics, and has a different predominant form from other Idylls such as The Holy Grail, in which Tennyson is creating a realm, a kingdom, a vision. The vision is of Arthur's kingdom recreated in the welding of various traditions within the idyll kind: epic, drama, romance, lyric and allegory.

CHAPTER TWO

The Coming of Arthur, loosely based on Book i of Malory's Morte d'Arthur, was written and published in 1869. The title of the trial edition was The Birth of Arthur. In contrast to all of Tennyson's sources, King Leodogran, a petty king of a remote region, is the first character the reader meets. Most of the other idylls are from sources (Malory, the Mabinogion or others) but this one is almost entirely Tennyson's own imaginative creation. It is significant that he begins with the seemingly unimportant figure, Leodogran, and spends so much time on various stories of Arthur's origins presented to him.

Through much of the idyll, Leodogran searches to find the truth about Arthur's origins and pretensions to the throne in an effort to find out what security his daughter would enjoy in being married to him. The unhelpful and aged chamberlain does little to help his enquiries, but points beyond himself to Merlin and Bleys; the former Arthur's adviser and unlikely to make any appearance, and the latter, recently dead, unable to give his version himself.

Other stories of Arthur's birth come from Bedivere, Arthur's honest, and at this stage unimaginative, first-made knight, and Bellicent, Lot of Orkney's wife. Each of these witnesses gives more than one version of the king's origins, combining folk-tale, magic and court intrigue; but none of these testimonies seems conclusive. Bedivere first gives two diametrically opposed views; firstly that he is called "baseborn" (179) by those who hate him, and secondly, that there are those who call him "more than man" (181) and say that he dropped from heaven. After saying this Bedivere gives his "belief" (182), hedged though it is with "so ye care to learn" (182) and "for all ye know" (184). The effect of all these tentative stops and starts is that this is not reported as fact by Bedivere but rather given as his own personally believed version.

Understandably, Leodogran is not convinced and Bellicent is asked for her version which tells of Arthur's crowning and the help he is promised by the mysterious Queens who stand beside his throne, and the support of the venerable Merlin of "vast wit" (279) and a "hundred winters" (280). But about her own relationship with Arthur, alleged to be her sibling, she

is consciously evasive. Leodogran vainly attempts to force some factual certainty out of her in an effort to establish her credentials:

> "But thou art closer to this noble prince,
> Being his own dear sister:" and she said
> "Daughter of Gorlois and Ygerne am I:"
> "And therefore Arthur's sister?" asked the king.
> She answered, "These be secret things..."
> (313-317)

Leodogran is still not convinced; he calls Arthur not "king" but "noble prince" (313). Bellicent does nothing to help his unbelief. She explains that all her family is dark but that Arthur is fair, not just fairer than her family but "beyond the race of Britons and of men" (330). This removes the likelihood of Arthur's ancestors being Bellicent's, and also implies that Arthur is somehow morally beyond the rest of humankind, an angel in human form. As well as this mysterious tale of his identity and origins, Bellicent tells of "the cry from out the dawning of [her] life" (332) and how she remembers her mother saying how she wished Bellicent had someone to guard her on the "rough ways of the world" (335).

Bellicent's attempt at an explanation of where Arthur comes from is given with Bleys as authority, yet she begins it saying she will "tell...another tale" (358). This tale is largely of magic and mystery, of a "dragon winged" (374) ship, of ghostly disembodied voices and flaming waves, the ninth and largest of which delivers the child Arthur to the feet of Merlin "who stoopt and caught the babe and cried 'The King'" (384). But again Bellicent undermines her own tale in telling Leodogran that when she asked Merlin if these things were true, she got only the "riddling triplets of old time" (401) for answer.

Merlin's song (which J.M. Gray in Man and Myth in Victorian England: Tennyson's "The Coming of Arthur" (1969) deems important enough to analyse line by line) can be seen to have a connection with Leodogran's search for knowledge. It is helpful to understand the genre of the song: what Tennyson calls the "triads of the Welsh bards" (Ricks, p.277). Geoffrey Ashe in The Arthurian Encyclopedia (1986) writes that "the triadic form in general may reflect Celtic ideas about the mystique of the number three" (p.565). Gray mentions that Tennyson had, in his library, D.W. Nash's Taliesin (1858) and T. Stephen's Literature of the Kymry (1848), both having information on and examples of ancient Welsh triads. Gray (1967) also helpfully quotes Edward Davies's Mythology and Rites (n.d.):

> The most singular feature of these versicles is, that the sense of the first two verses has no obvious connection with that of the last. The first line contains some trivial remark, suggested by the state of the air, the season of the year, the accidental meeting of some animal, or the like. To this is frequently subjoined something that savours more of reflection; then the third line comes home to the heart, with a weighty moral precept, or a pertinent remark upon men and manners.
> (Gray, p.13)

The song begins with the image of the rainbow in the sky, an outward sign often associated with an understanding or agreement between God and Man:

> Rain, rain and sun! a rainbow in the sky!
> A young man will be wiser by and by;
> An old man's wit may wander ere he die.
> Rain, rain, and sun! a rainbow on the lea!
> And truth is this to me, and that to thee;
> And truth or clothed or naked let it be.
> Rain, sun and rain! and the free blossom blows:
> Sun, rain and sun! and where is he who knows?
> From the great deep to the great deep he goes.
> (402-410)

(Gray (1967) gives Biblical references for the symbolic nature of the rainbow: Gen.,9:3 and Ezek.,1:28; Gray, p. 27.) The rainbow used in Arthur's case has obvious significance. Arthur is the redeeming child-figure sent by God to subdue the beast, to make "a realm and rule" (518). Divine sanction is important, of course, but Merlin's song is still confusing, even paradoxical. The "young man" who "will be wiser by and by" (401) begins the cycle that will end in the "old man's wit" (404) wandering before he dies. Not only is the individual fated to grow from youth and ignorance to maturity and wisdom but he must continue the cycle and become, like Bleys, ineffectual and of wandering wit; in some ways a credulous child once again. The refrain "Rain, rain and sun" is inconstant as is the rainbow which descends from the sky to the lea. Through all this the truth, absolute knowledge, remains unknowable, ever evasive and subjective with no man having an all-encapsulating vision but seeing part or parts of the whole which sometimes appears obscured, and sometimes clearer: "And the truth or clothed or naked let it be" (407). In whatever guise, however, truth must remain free as it cannot be made anything other than what it is, the truth, unencumbered by subjective impositions. Gray (1967) notes that "epistemologies are ultimately spurious if it is thought that truth is altered by them" (p.13).

Tennyson's note, quoted by Ricks, clarifies this further: "The truth appears in different guise to divers persons. The one fact is that man comes from the great deep and returns to it" (p.277). Paradoxically, the

only way knowledge can be gleaned is by acknowledging that one understands nothing, in true Socratic fashion. The "Rain, sun and rain" (408) may be a preparation for the coming revelation of mortals passing "from the great deep to the great deep" (410), but the "free blossom" blowing is a reference to the impossibility of actually capturing knowledge which must remain free to be blown about.

Bellicent, although irritated by "Merlin's riddling", seems to understand the importance of her question and the impossibility of Merlin's giving any satisfactory answer. She recognises Arthur as a timeless and mythic figure, and where he comes from and where he goes to, she seems to realise, are not appropriate questions:

> So Merlin riddling angered me; but thou
> Fear not to give this king thine only child,
> Guinevere: so great bards of him will sing
> Hereafter; and dark sayings from of old
> Ranging and ringing through the minds of men,
> And echoed by old folk beside their fires
> For comfort after their wage-work is done,
> Speak of the king; and Merlin in our time
> Hath spoken also, not in jest, but sworn
> Though men may wound him that he will not die,
> But pass, again to come; and then or now
> Utterly smite the heathen underfoot,
> Till these and all men hail him for their king.
> (411-423)

Bellicent's testimony has gone beyond the physical reality of Arthur's mortal existence. She has understood an important truth about Arthur's ontology; for her Arthur has become a poetic symbol. In this insight Bellicent offers to Leodogran an Arthur who cannot be killed and who does have the power to "utterly smite" the unbeliever. This symbolic Arthur will become the property of "great bards", to comfort and elevate all men; imperishable and limitless because of his metaphysical, poetic existence "Ranging and ringing through the minds of men" (emphasis mine, 415).

Even so, with all the various and conflicting evidence Leodogran still cannot make up his mind and "muses": "Shall I answer yea or nay" (425).

It is not that Leodogran is a difficult audience. The various stories he does hear show him to be discerning. He rejects his hoary chamberlain's evidence out of hand and rejoices in what Bellicent has to tell him, partaking in the imaginative telling with delight; but an appropriate response to a story is not enough to qualify as a believer. Leodogran's dream is, to some extent, the synthesis of all that is told to him before. Through the mythic mists the "phantom king" (429) appears. The beast is

suppressed, but the fire, chaos and bestiality of the slaying men is uncontrolled by the voice of their king. In spite of those who point at him and cry in the wilderness, death and destruction continue unabated. Then, in "a wink" (440), the king is removed from the temporality of his surroundings and stands out crowned "in heaven" (442) with the solid earth becoming "as nothing" (442).

Leodogran's choice, then, is to forego the security he at first demands from Arthur for a leap of faith into the realm of myth. There is no ambiguity about the immediate future. Arthur will fail. He will pass because he is mortal; but he will also return not just in the allegorical natural cycle of one level of the poem, but in a poetic, spiritual and mythic way which any co-creating reader can recall at will. Leodogran is not as much an anxious father, as he is a moral and epistemological philosopher and a reader of (or listener to) poetry. Leodogran is prepared to set aside the immediate temporal gratification of his need for stability when he understands that what he is questioning is bigger than him, his needs and even his times. Once this is understood Leodogran becomes the announcer of the new age by his fiat:

> And Leodogran awoke, and sent
> Ulfias, and Brastias and Bedivere,
> Back to the court of Arthur answering yea.
> (443-445)

This fiat is based on an education dealing with a variety of experiences like the experiences of all those who must deal with the mystery of Arthur's coming. The education is, however, of a spiritual nature; Tennyson's mythopoeia poetically expressing the ongoing spiritual war of sense and soul which expands beyond the poetic frame. Arthur's coming and his passing are shrouded in mystery at either end of the cycle. Tennyson's concerns are not empirical or epistemological, rather they are moral, expressed in an adopted and personally adapted mythology.

Leodogran is a model for the reader of the Idylls. William E. Buckler, in Man and His Myths (1984), explains:

> Leodogran enacts in miniature a classic ritual of mythmaking. (1) He wants to believe implicitly in the complete authenticity of this saviour-king named Arthur... (2) He is an astute man, quickly putting in perspective the bumbling ineptitude of his "hoary chamberlain" and the forthright, earthy, circumstantial naturalism of Bedivere. But he is a keenly imaginative man too, responding fully to the accomplished elegance and strange cogency of Bellicent's strange witnessing... (3) He experiences a "miraculous revelation" - that is, all the emblemic experiences he has gone through, together with his need and strong disposition to believe, induce in him, at the unconscious centre of his

> creative being and with unclouded clarity of affirmation, belief in Arthur's divine right to kingship, compared to which "the solid earth" and all naturalistic explanations are as nothing. Thus Leodogran's ritual of mythmaking, a miniature of reader-response to Idylls of the King, is fully enacted.
>
> (p.32-33)

One means by which Tennyson achieves the complex response of the reader to the newly told, but age-old, myth of Arthur, is by not having any set specific generic expectations aroused, or at least confusing these expectations. Tennyson's retelling of the myth has so many characteristics of an epic that it cannot be a coincidence. There is a complex unity of genres (discussed in the introduction).

Unity on the allegorical level is provided by the cycle of the seasons. Arthur arrives at the turn of the year, he weds Guinevere in spring. It is also spring when Gareth sets out for Camelot. The cycle continues: Vivien seduces Merlin just before the breaking of the summer storm, The Last Tournament is in the autumn and the last weird battle is fought in the death-white mists of winter. Arthur passes from this world to Avilion at midnight in mid-winter. The entire cycle closes with "the new sun rose bringing the new year" (PA,469).

The Idylls is an experimental poem cycle in which Tennyson is harking back to genres packed with various expectations but allowing his poem to be unpacked without scuttling any one established genre. Understanding the genre of the cycle is important generally, but it is vital that it is clearly established in The Coming of Arthur. It is precisely because the poem is not an epic but an idyll cycle that the reader is expected to participate in Tennyson's creative process. He establishes "the approximate relationship for the imaginative reading act" (Buckler, p.32).

Gray (1969), I think logically, divides the poem into three distinct parts which correspond, at least on the level of the seasonal theme, with this theme in the entire cycle. The framing sections, lines 1-146 and lines 446-518, enclose the inner stories told to Leodogran who is attempting to ascertain Arthur's stability and right to claim high-kingship. There is the testimony of the "hoary chamberlain", Ulfias, Brastias and various ones from Bedivere as well as the imaginative versions from Bellicent. These are all synthesized in a dream and this section concludes with Leodogran's answer "yea" (445).

Arthur appears at the turn of the seasons and at midnight of the new

year (208) Lancelot and not Arthur, however, links the three parts of the poem. He leaves Camelot to escort Guinevere back in late April and returns in early May for her wedding with Arthur. In the concluding section Arthur establishes his independence from Rome and the knights' song is sung in the white of May when Arthur's wife and subjects are united in will and vision (Gray (1969) p.17).

In the design there is a delicately balanced symmetry (Gray (1969) p.17). Tennyson added two balancing sets of vows in 1873; one set to each of the framing parts of The Coming of Arthur: the deathless love sworn on a field of death (131) between Arthur and Lancelot, and the wedding vows of Arthur and Guinevere in the last part of the frame in which Guinevere replies to the King's vow: "King and my lord, I love thee to the death" (469). Both are "deathless" and Tennyson with sensitivity exploits the irony of these mutually exclusive vows; the swearers, other than Arthur, fated to lead the entire Round Table to corruption and eventual destruction.

The heroic figure of Arthur is enough to qualify the poem as having epic pretensions, yet in Arthur's first speech uncertainty is expressed almost before the crown grows warm on his head. Arthur presents himself as more of an existential figure riddled with doubt than as an epic hero of fixed purpose. He sees himself as incomplete, not just as king but also as individual:

> What happiness to reign a lonely king,
> Vext - O ye stars that shudder over me,
> O earth that soundest hollow under me,
> Vext with waste dreams? 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. But were I joined with her,
> Then might we live together as one life,
> And reigning with one will in everything
> Have power on this dark land and lighten it,
> And power on this dead world to make it live.
> (81-93)

Once Arthur is decided on a course of marital unity his purpose and vision are clear and fixed:

> ...the world
> Was all so clear about him, that he saw
> The smallest rock far on the faintest hill,
> And even in high day the morning star.
> (96-99)

Arthur does have supernatural sanction for his kingship. Although there

are some "great Lords and Barons" (64) of Arthur's realm who join with the rebel "petty kings" (67) against his rule, Arthur is the beloved of the "powers who walk the world" (106). On the field, Lancelot echoes Peter's profession of faith (Mt.16:17, Mk.8:27-30, Lk.9:18-21) in his recognition of Arthur as his rightful God-appointed king:

> "Sir and my liege," he cried, "the fire of God
> Descends upon thee in the battle-field:
> I know thee for my king!"
> (127-129)

Even though Leodogran can be seen as a surrogate reader, the actual reader is in a far better position than he is when he begins his enquiries. In the opening lines of the poem we are told:

> King Arthur for a space,
> And through the puissance of his Table Round,
> Drew all their petty princedoms under him,
> Their king and head, and made a realm, and reigned.
> (16-19)

Arthur's influence has not yet been felt in remote Cameliard and Leodogran's realm seems more afflicted by barbarism than many places closer to Arthur's Camelot. The reader is given some fore-knowledge because of the marked chronological shift between lines 19 and 20. This is quite in keeping with the distancing devices found in the idyll genre generally and in Tennyson's Idylls in particular. As well as the flash-backs there are different narrative voices, although there is one central omniscient narrator. There are also many allusions (especially Biblical), digressions, subplots and various levels on which the whole can be read. Tennyson distinguishes between Arthurian authors. He introduces himself as "he...who tells the tale" (94), but there is also an older author (Malory and others), "he that told the tale in older times" (GL,1392). This method of calling on an older and better established story teller is not only a means of distancing the teller from the reader but also, by appealing to tradition, a means of rendering the story more convincing. The metre, images, diction and syntax also proclaim the importance of Tennyson's myth; the blank verse rolling on, majestic but impenetrably mysterious:

> And then the two [Bleys and Merlin]
> Dropt to the cove, and watched the great sea fall,
> Wave after wave, each mightier than the last,
> Till last, a ninth one, gathering half the deep
> And full of voices, slowly rose and plunged
> Roaring, and all the wave was in a flame:
> And down the wave and in the flame was borne
> A naked babe, and rode to Merlin's feet,
> Who stoopt and caught the babe, and cried "The King!"
> (376-384)

In this there is both poetic imagery, building up to the flaming climax, and folk tale, that every ninth wave "is supposed by the Welsh bards to be larger than those that go before" (Ricks, p.227). Arthur is also allied with the positive forces of fairyland. His rule is sanctioned by the magicians, Merlin and Bleys, the three Queens and The Lady of the Lake who as a token of her support gives Arthur the sword Excalibur.

The "hoary chamberlain" does not do much to advance Leodogran's quest himself but he does introduce two of these mysterious characters. One is Merlin, old venerable, wise and a magician. The other is Bleys, also a magician, who keeps an air of mystery about him even when he is about to die, then looking as though he is a "fairy changeling" (362). Merlin has superseded Bleys who has retired from active magic because of his age. Bleys records all of Merlin's doings in a great annal-book where only unspecified readers in "after years" will learn the "secret of our Arthur's birth" (157-158). (It is of obvious significance that Merlin is a bard as well as a magician.) Arthur's secrets are removed from the world of men and are made the preserve of literature.

Continuing the theme of magic and Fairyland, the

> ...three fair queens
> Who [stand] in silence near his [Arthur's] throne, the friends Of
> Arthur, gazing on him, tall with bright
> Sweet faces, who will help him at his need
> (275-278)

make short and mysterious appearances throughout Arthur's reign but do not seem to be of much practical help. The Queens carry off Arthur after the last hideous battle when he is mortally wounded:

> They [Arthur and Bedivere] were ware
> That all the decks were dense with stately forms,
> Black-stoled, black hooded, like a dream - by these
> Three Queens with crowns of gold: and from them rose
> A cry that shivered to the tingling stars...
> (PA,363-367)

In spite of these shadowy, mysterious characters, Tennyson assures readers of the Idylls that "there is no single fact or incident, however seemingly mystical, which cannot be explained as without any mystery or allegory whatever" (Ricks, p.285).

> The Bishop of Ripon (Boyd Carpenter) once asked him (Tennyson) whether they were right who interpreted the three queens who accompanied King Arthur on his last voyage as Faith Hope and Charity. He answered: "They are right, and they are not right. They mean that and they do not. They are three of the noblest of women. They are also the three graces, but they are also much more. I hate to be tied down to say, 'This means that,' because the thought within the image is much more than any one interpretation".

(Ricks, p.258)

The Queens are present at the high points of Arthur's life; his birth, his coronation and finally at his death. This gives closure to Tennyson's myth, a sense of completeness and symmetry.

The Lady of the Lake, too, seems to take no active part in Arthur's worldly work other than to give her sanction to it. Bellicent tells how the Lady gives Arthur his great sword Exclaibur at his coronation with sacramental solemnity:

> And near him stood the Lady of the Lake,
> Who knows a subtler magic than his own - [Merlin's]
> Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful.
> She gave the King his huge cross-hilted sword,
> Whereby to drive the heathen out: a mist
> Of incense curled about her, and her face
> Wellnigh was hidden in the minster gloom;
> But there was heard among the holy hymns
> A voice as of the waters, for she dwells
> Down in a deep; calm, whatsoever storms
> May shake the world, and when the surface rolls,
> Hath power to walk the waters like our Lord.
> (282-293)

Ricks gives Tennyson's own note: that "the Lady of the Lake in the old legends is the Church" (p.274). This is ambiguous. Does it mean that Tennyson wants his Lady of the Lake to be the Church as well, or does it mean that she used to be the Church but has come to mean something different? Probably, judging from Tennyson's answer to the Bishop of Ripon, the Lady of the Lake is both and more. There is no doubt there is ecclesiastical imagery in the cowled face, the ascending wisps of incense, the cloister-like "minster gloom" as well as the sacramental baptism waters which she has the power to walk "like our Lord". There is also the Biblical allusion Tennyson notes, comparing: "But there was heard among the holy hymns / A voice as of the waters...", with Revelation, 14:2: "I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters" (Ricks, p.274).

Tennyson, however, achieves some mystery surrounding the Lady of the Lake, leaving her free to be many other things. There is some quality about her that resists analysis in the same way that Arthur's connection with Fairyland resists analysis. In this idyll, Bleys looks like a fairy changeling and in Gareth and Lynette, Gareth's companions cry "...this king is not the king, / But only changeling out of Fairyland" (GL,199-200). There are other references to fairyland, possibly included to work atmospherically and adding variety to the "glancing colours" : "poetry is

like shot-silk with many glancing colours. Every reader must find his own interpretation according to his ability, and according to his own sympathy with the poet" (Tennyson, quoted by Ricks, p.258).

Adding to the "glancing colours" are the variations in style in the cycle. Tennyson said in a letter to the Duke of Argyll that The Coming of Arthur and the Passing of Arthur are "simpler and more severe in style, as dealing with the awfulness of Birth and Death" (p.261). Buckley comments that the "linguistic archaicism" counterpointed against "a quiet firm sense of modern relevance resulting in an attitude of perenniality, a mutability of a metaphorically permanent sort" (p.26). And Ann Ritchie (qouted in Ricks, p.258) reports "The first idyll and the last, I have heard Mr. Tennyson say, are intentionally more archaic than the others".

"Modern relevance" does not necessarily mean easy understandability or clarity, though. The theme of both framing poems is Birth and Death and consequently remains inexplicable. The Coming of Arthur is not only made more distant and obscure by the archaic language, but as Gray (1969) comments, Tennyson is "using every literary device of indirection and complication available open to him, to make definition impossible, wholly problematic" (p.3).

Buckler sums up the importance and complexity of the poem:

> As Idylls of the King, then, is an image of the mighty world, so The Coming of Arthur is an image of Idylls of the King. It is both a fascinating story and a complex, multiply refractive. long-lingering, imaginative inducement to the reader to know something of himself and of this world he will leave so soon.
>
> (p.35)

Gareth and Lynette

Gareth and Lynette was published in 1872, but is placed as the first poem in Tennyson's collection The Round Table and the first "core" poem in the Idylls. From line 430 onwards the poem is based on Malory Book vii, the first part being the product of Tennyson's own imagination.

Gareth is introduced as an idealistic man of action with

a chivalrous disposition and a clear distinction between right and wrong, true and false. The most natural phenomena are seen through Gareth's knightly spectacles:

> A slender-shafted Pine
> Lost footing, fell, and so was whirled away.
> "How he went down," said Gareth, "as a false knight
> Or evil king before my lance if lance
> Were mine to use ..."
> (3-7)

Gareth's imagination and his desire for freedom are important themes and are linked. It is through his imaginative acceptance of Arthur's world that Gareth is able to earn both personal and spiritual freedom.

He wishes to be free from his mother and her velvet confinement: "Good mother is bad mother unto me!" (16); though his desire for freedom is more complicated than this somewhat adolescent wish. The reader is also expected to participate in Gareth's desire for freedom by actively co-creating the poem, as is the case in The Coming of Arthur (and indeed, all the Idylls). Tennyson's mythic age must be entered through the "cloud" (128) at the beginning of the cycle.

To explain his understanding of freedom to his mother, Gareth compares himself with an eagle. Like a discaged eagle Gareth is allowed to fly and sweep

> In ever-heightening eagle-circles up
> To the great Sun of Glory, and thence swoop
> Down upon all things base, and dash them dead.
> (20-23)

In the first story he tells his mother (42-58) Gareth sees himself as climbing ever higher, striving for the royal Eagle's golden egg. Bellicent, ostensibly worried about his safety, stops him. His answer is that over-much physical protection could result in emotional and spiritual stagnation, frustration or even death.

Gareth's ambition is not for himself, nor does he wish to become wealthy. His priority is knightly virtue and spiritual holiness. What he sees sparkling at the top of the eagle's nest (in his story) is not gold at all, although his mother presumes that it is. He answers her with some warmth:

> "Gold? said I gold? - ay then, why he, or she,
> Or whosoe'er it was, or half the world
> Had ventured - had the thing I spake of been

Mere gold - but this was all of that true steel,
Whereof they forged the brand Excalibur,
And lightnings played about it in the storm,
And all the little fowl were flurried at it,
And there were cries and clashings in the nest,
That sent him from his senses: let me go."
(62-70)

In the face of this poetic outburst, Bellicent withdraws. Her answer is on an emotional level, a level better suited to her manipulating: "Hast thou no pity upon my loneliness?" (72). Bellicent offers Gareth the Herculean choice of fame and shame. His mind is clear in this. He is firm that anything other than a knightly life is "shame", and he tells his mother another of his stories to enable her to understand how he feels. His story is of two brides; one "fair, strong, armed - / But to be won by force" and the other "whom no man desired". She is "red-faced" and "vile" (ll 103-109).

Her final attempt to keep Gareth at home is an attack on his pride. She demands a show of humility that would stop anyone less nobly motivated and less determined than Gareth. He is told that he may go to Arthur's court provided he becomes a servingman for a year and a day. This he agrees to do. Gareth recognises that true freedom is not dependent on whether or not one's noble station is acknowledged.

On the way to Camelot the country-side reflects Arthur's as yet blemish-free court:

The birds made
Melody on branch, and melody in mid air.
The damp hill-slopes were quickened into green,
And the live green had kindled into flowers,
For it was past the time of Easterday.
(179-183)

Spring-time Gareth can be paired with the autumnal and more easily disillusioned Pelleas. The contrast of the two knights with each other gives some clue as to what Tennyson envisaged as an ideal knight of Camelot. Gareth and Lynette is the only idyll in the cycle where such an ideal figure is presented. Buckler explains:

> Thus one can fairly expect to find in Gareth and Lynette, not only the individual story of a youth passing into manhood, with the qualifications, impediments, and trials thereof, but also a reasonably full elaboration of the ambient culture in which he functions - the nature of that special moment in time through which he moves and by which, however distinctively individual he may be, his success or failure is in part determined. That culture is, in the imaginative fiction of Idylls of the King, Arthurian and is embodied in an order called The Round Table; hence, in the first of

> the Round Table idylls one looks for an exemplification of what Arthurianism means, of what the special character of this order of men is. (p.158)

What Tennyson calls "sense at war with soul", appearance at war with reality, is the most important of the unifying themes in the idylls. It is from this theme that most of the others are derived. In reading the cycle one is forced, in the same way that Gareth is forced, to decide what reality is. When he enters Camelot for the first time, he agrees to do so on Merlin's terms. Merlin tells Gareth that if he passes beneath the archway he becomes "A thrall to his [Arthur's] enchantments" (265). Once in Camelot Gareth participates in the building of the city built "To music, therefore never built at all, / And therefore built for ever" (273).

The reader, like Gareth, enters into this mythic world as a co-creator with the poet, having the same consequent imaginative burden to bear. Tennyson's story, unlike Malory's, is crafted so that the reader is aware from the outset that disbelief must be suspended. Imaginative co-creation of the Idylls allows the reader the same spiritual freedom Gareth feels, even when he is working as a thrall in the king's kitchens. Gareth's freedom comes through humility, since this is the way of the ideal knight. Only by becoming a thrall and giving up princely pretensions can he win his freedom. He also has a crash course in humility when he meets, and is defeated by, Lancelot who fails to recognise him because he is using a foreign shield. Gareth's "Lead, and I follow", is a model of humble knighthood.

Gareth, Arthur, Lancelot and the hospitable Baron whom Gareth saves are all perspicacious. Bellicent, Lynette and Kay show various degrees of obtuseness. The difference between these groups of characters is not only in their respective levels of discernment. Action characterises Gareth and his group; passivity the other group. Gareth on several occasions refers to his actions as his means of expression: "Say thou thy say, and I will do my deed" (879). His actions serve to reveal his honour, humility and desire to do that which is right. As a foil to this, Kay's blustering and ranting does nothing for his credibility as a noble knight. His defeat at the hands of Gareth is consequently no great surprise. Lynette also serves as a foil to Gareth since

she wants only her words to stand for her. When she changes her mind, she changes her own created reality, and so changes herself.

It is in this idyll that we learn of the motifs of time, music, magic and fairies. The magical city of Camelot appears and vanishes in the mist, unnerving Gareth's two companions:

> 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.
> (189-93)

Gareth's unimaginative companions are included as foils for Tennyson's ideal knight:

> Then those who went with Gareth were amazed,
> One crying, "Let us go no further, lord.
> Here is a city of Enchanters, built
> By fairy Kings." The second echoed him,
> "Lord, we have heard from our wise man at home
> To Northward, that this King is not the King,
> But only changeling out of Fairyland,
> Who drave the heathen hence by sorcery
> And Merlin's glamour." Then the first again,
> "Lord, there is no such city anywhere,
> But all a vision."
> (194-204)

In spite of the fears of these companions, Gareth remains undaunted, uncowered and supremely confident of his own imaginative ability:

> Gareth answered them
> With laughter, swearing he had glamour enow
> In his own blood, his princedom, youth and hopes,
> To plunge old Merlin in the Arabian sea.
> (204-207)

By passing through the gate, Gareth enters into Merlin's imaginatively created timeless zone. In the same way the reader enters into Tennyson's poetically created never-never land. An "ancient man" (Merlin) comes out of the gateway and gives Gareth the same message of subjective reality that he offered in his "riddling triplets": "And here is truth; but an it please thee not, / Take thou the truth as thou hast told it me" (252-253).

Merlin mentions truth, not knowledge. By entering into this city, a world of its own, Gareth is told he is giving up the commonly-held view of reality and subscribing to Arthur's belief system. He is warned that in Camelot priorities are not the same as they are in the outside world.

> Yet take thou heed of him, for, so thou pass
> Beneath this archway, then wilt thou become

A thrall to his enchantments, for the King
Will bind thee by such vows, as is a shame
A man should not be bound by, yet the which
No man can keep; but, so thou dread to swear,
Pass not beneath this gateway, but abide
Without, among the cattle of the field.
(263-270)

Camelot is presented as a battle-ground of warring sense and soul, both within the individual characters and later socially, involving the entire Round Table.

In Gareth and Lynette the sense/soul war has not yet begun. It is appropriate then, that Tennyson makes extended mention of music, metonymic of social harmony. In this regard Merlin is an important figure. He is the bard, the poet and musician and he is connected with the creation of Camelot by music. Merlin is a mage, learned in all arts and one whose hand "had touched" everywhere (300). He tells Gareth and his companions:

For an ye heard a music, like enow
They are building still, seeing the city is built
To music, therefore never built at all,
And therefore built for ever.
(272-275)

Merlin's perception is of reality. Appearances do not deceive him, as he lets Gareth know when he penetrates his disguise.

I mock thee not but as thou mockest me,
And all that see thee, for thou art not who
Thou seemest, but I know thee who thou art.
(283-285)

Gareth's companions do not come into the story again. Their only function seems to be to allow the reader to contrast them with Gareth, and for them to point out the moving door. Gareth seems slightly worried by his hiding of the truth about his identity and shows generosity of spirit in absolving his mother of all blame (I am assuming that Bellicent is the referent of "she"):

My men,
Our one white lie sits like a little ghost
Here on the threshold of our enterprise.
Let love be blamed for it, not she, not I:
Well, we will make amends.
(291-293)

He also shows enough sense to realise that he cannot blame himself for the dilemma. What is interesting is that his lie is not blamed on any human agency, but is ascribed to an ideal love which even Gareth seems to realise

cannot be achieved, even in spring-time Camelot. The lie is blamed on love: Gareth's love of freedom and the love between him and his mother.

To establish Arthur's claim to kingship as just, there are three cases that demand his judgement. The first case, that of returning the widow's field to her, is a clear-cut one. Arthur says of this: "No boon is here, / But justice..." (338-40). The second case is more difficult. The king must attempt to remain an impartial judge over his erstwhile enemy's widow. Arthur appears transcendent while delivering judgement, soul triumphing over sense. He tells the plaintiff: "Peace to thee woman, with thy loves and hates!" (365).

The sense and soul theme is raised again in the third case. King Mark of Cornwall, Arthur's foe, sends a rich and beautiful cloth as a gift. The presumption is that Mark, on the strength of his gift, will be accepted as a knight of the Round Table. Arthur rends the cloth and throws it in the fire. The gift is obviously an attempt by Mark to bribe Arthur. The Round Table has a spiritual nature and Arthur's anger is aroused because a sensory gift cannot be exchanged for spiritual rewards.

When it is Gareth's turn to ask a boon, there is some irony in Arthur's having to judge him by his appearance alone. Gareth asks Arthur "For meat and drink among thy kitchen-knaves / A twelvemonth and a day, nor seek my name./ Hereafter I will fight" (437-439).

Arthur has nothing other than Gareth's appearance on which to base his judgement, but this is enough for him. Arthur, because of his holiness and integrity, can see through deception in the same way that Merlin can see through Gareth's disguise when he shows himself at the carved door of Camelot.

Lancelot and Merlin have some measure of Arthur's perspicacity. Both realise that Gareth is not what he seems to be. Lancelot tells Kay that although he (Kay) is a fine judge of the unspiritual, the horse and the dog, he is no judge of men.

> Sleuth-hound thou knowest, and gray, and all the hounds;
> A horse thou knowest, a man thou dost not know:
> Broad brows and fair, a fluent hair and fine,
> High nose, a nostril large and fine, and hands
> Large, fair and fine! - Some young lad's mystery-
> But, or from sheepcote or king's hall, the boy

Is noble-natured. Treat him with all grace,
Lest he should come to shame thy judging of him.
(452-459)

Whether or not there is some ironic humour in Lancelot's description of Gareth is uncertain. All Lancelot's observations here are superficial and in the nature of a animal trader or seller extolling the virtues of his live-stock. More important is that Lancelot sees Gareth's inherent dignity in spite of what appears to be his humble rank. Dignity and nobility have nothing, in Lancelot's view, to do with birth and station. It is the spiritual qualities that are important.

Kay is described as "a man of mien / Wan-sallow as the plant that feels itself / Root-bitten by white lichen" (443-444). He is uniformly imperceptive, not evil but a cad and a knave. When the premature and liberating message from Bellicent comes for Gareth, he is overjoyed and asks the King to make him a knight at once. This Arthur agrees to do, on condition that Lancelot is allowed to know of the developments. Gareth is obliged to take certain binding vows "as is a shame / A man should not be bound by, yet the which / No man can keep..." (266). The tension of trying to keep these vows which prove impossible, points to the inherent conflict of Arthur's Round Table, which Merlin, even in this springtime idyll, acknowledges. Arthur knights Gareth not only because he thinks Gareth is worthy, but also because Bellicent asks him to. Gareth, by becoming a knight, exchanges the difficult yoke of Kay for the impossibly binding vows of Arthur who tells him:

Son, the good mother let me know thee here,
And sent her wish that I would yield thee thine.
Make thee my knight? my knights are sworn to vows
Of utter hardihood, utter gentleness,
And, loving, utter faithfulness in love,
And uttermost obedience to the King.
(539-544)

The irony of Arthur's insisting that Lancelot is his "noblest" and "truest" man is evident and needs nothing more than mentioning. Gareth accepts the King's word in this matter without question.

It is also significant that Gareth surrenders his name until he feels he has justly earned the claim to it: "Let be my name until I make my name! / My

deeds will speak: it is but for a day" (562-563). He shows a healthy belief in himself and his abilities, with honesty but not vanity.

When Lynette arrives at Arthur's court she asks Arthur that he see to the "foe within" (580). In this case the foe is Lynette's own pride which eventually will be dispelled by Gareth's deeds.

But there are other enemies. Lynette tells the assembled court of the four knights besieging Lyonors and of the threat hanging over her. She also introduces the allegorical sub-theme of the idyll, describing the knights as "of foolish fashion" but "mighty men" (628). These knights have taken for their allegorical model times of day to represent various stages of life and each knight personifies the temptations associated with some particular age. The knight representing youth's trials calls himself "Morning-Star" and the pattern is followed by "Noon-Sun", "Evening-Star" and seemingly mightiest, "Night" or oftener "Death".

Gareth demands the quest according to the promise Arthur made him (and Bellicent). Lynette on having Gareth assigned as her champion, and believing him to be a kitchen knave, storms off, considering herself slighted. Kay, who seems particularity jealous of Gareth's achievements, is described as an animal:

> Pluckt from the cur he fights with, ere his cause
> Be cooled by fighting, follows, being named,
> His owner, but remembers all and growls
> Remembering,...
>
> (686-690)

It is no surprise then, that when Gareth and the beastly Kay joust, Kay falls "shoulder-slipt". Gareth's domination is important because it underlines the supposition that good deeds come out of the nobility of the doer. Deeds and words, but not appearances, are the reflection of the state of relative goodness of the individual. The linking of words and deeds as actions is important. In the same way that actions reveal the nobility, or lack of nobility, of a character, so too do words. Arthur calls a vow "God's word in man", and when Lynette reviles Gareth his only answer is an ironic smile and "I shall assay" (763).

Throughout the idyll, Gareth when talking to Lynette uses the formula "Lead, and I follow" (741). This may not be anything more than Gareth's

expression of knightly humility, but there is also something of this formula in the book of Ruth, where Ruth says to her mother-in-law Naomi:

> Wherever you go I will go,
> Wherever you live I will live.
> Your people will be my people
> And your God, my God.
> Wherever you die, I will die...
> (1:16-17)

Certainly something Gareth and Ruth have in common is that for both of them only death will end their undertaken duty. Gareth's answer to Lynette's scornful condemnation of him is quiet and gentle. It has the same assurance that Ruth's has:

> "Damsel," Sir Gareth answered gently, "say
> Whate'er ye will, but whatso'er ye say,
> I leave not till I finish this fair quest,
> Or die therefore."
> (753-756)

There is a more remote connection between Gareth and Ruth. Both are judged by their noble actions. Gareth's saving of the Baron is a detail added to Malory, possibly to make the point that Gareth's actions give the only necessary information about him. The Baron is unconcerned about Gareth's origins. For him it is sufficient that the young man "...strikest a strong stroke" (856), and while talking to him he makes it evident that his concern is for Gareth's welfare more than his reputation:

> For strong thou art and goodly therewithal,
> And saver of my life; and therefore now,
> For here be mighty men to joust with, weigh
> Whether thou wilt not with thy damsel back
> To crave again Sir Lancelot of the King.
> (857-863)

While the Baron and Gareth talk, Lynette has been put next to the peacock in its pride. The significance of this is evident, but in spite of herself, Lynette is not completely ruthless. She is concerned about Gareth's safety. Before he meets the first defender of the river crossing she advises Gareth to turn back. To this he replies: "Say thou thy say, and I will do my deed" (876).

Having made plain his determination to go through with the quest, Gareth defeats Morning-Star who must beg for his life from Lynette - a humbling experience for her.

It is after he has defeated Evening-Star that Lynette realises that Gareth is, at least as a result of his actions, worthy of as much courtesy and respect as any other knight. When he tells Lynette "Lead, and I follow," she stops the pattern: "I lead no longer; ride thou at my side; / Thou art the kingliest of all kitchen-knaves" (1128-1129).

It is after this about-face that Gareth loses something of his humility. He bears no personal grudge against Lynette, but he does think it censurable that she should doubt the King's discretion:

> "Damsel," he said, "you be not all to blame,
> Saving that you mistrusted our good King
> Would handle scorn, or yield you, asking, one
> Not fit to cope your quest..."
> (1142-1146)

As Lynette loses pride Gareth becomes vain. He tells Lynette: "And seeing now thy words are fair, methinks / There rides no knight, not Lancelot his great self, / Hath force to quell me" (1152-1154). But Gareth's over-confidence is soon dispelled by the appearance of Lancelot who throws him with consummate ease.

In her song Lynette uses the allegorical scheme adopted by the four renegade knights for her own purpose. She sings a stanza after every victory Gareth wins over allegorical adversaries. At first she seems to be addressing the defeated knights, but she immediately disclaims this:

> "O morning star" (not that tall felon there
> Whom thou by sorcery or unhappiness
> Or some device, hast foully overthrown),
> "O morning star that smilest in the blue,
> O star, my morning dream hath proven true,
> Smile sweetly, thou! my love hath smiled on me."
> (971-976)

Gray makes sense in talking about the Morning Star as "Venus, star of love in the ascendant" (1980,p.98). As Gareth defeats the other knights, first the red, cipher-faced Noon-day Sun who is "washed away" (1020), and then the Star of Evening, Lynette continues her interrupted song. Twice and thrice her love has smiled on her and the sun invoked in the second stanza (1040-1042) "is the source of light and warmth that gives life to the beautiful natural world of flowers and birds celebrated in the next two stanzas" (Gray (1980) p.99). The third stanza (1130-1132) comes after Gareth has defeated the Evening-Star. He is not what he appears to be, an old and feeble knight, but a rather

determined and difficult adversary, an Antaeus of Greek mythology and a Maleger (The Faerie Queene II Canto xi) to Gareth's Hercules and Arthur. Many times he is defeated by Gareth but each time the knight springs up, a personification of bad habits, and continues the fray. With the defeat of the Evening-Star, Gareth is the "kingliest" of all kitchen-knaves. Gray points out that the "trefoil" in the third stanza and the three colours of the rainbow, symbolise fidelity. This, continues Gray, helps "to resolve the poem at its unexpectedly comic end". "It is with dance / And revel and song" that all make "merry over death" (1387-1389).

Running through the established and evident pattern of the allegory, with Gareth defeating Noon-tide and Evening in turn, the theme of appearance and reality is continued. Lancelot arrives after being held up helping the "dislocated Kay" (l 1183), and schools Gareth in preparation for the coming battle with death. Gareth assumes, in some senses, Lancelot's identity, not only his tuition in "How best to manage horse, lance, sword and shield, / And so fill the gap where force might fail / With skill and fineness" (1316-1318), but he also takes Lancelot's charger and shield.

> Said Lancelot, "Peradventure he, you name,
> May know my shield. Let Gareth, an he will,
> Change his for mine, and take my charger, fresh,
> Not to be spurred, loving the battle as well
> As he that rides him."
>
> (1266-1270)

Gareth faces Death, purged of pride after the fall at the hands of Lancelot, and with all the tactical know-how and outward signs of Lancelot. Ironically, even though he himself is not what he seems, Gareth is angry that Death, who is supposed to have the strength of ten, has taken on such a deceptively frightening appearance:

> "Fool, for thou hast, men say, the strength of ten,
> Canst thou not trust the limbs thy God hath given,
> But must, to make the terror of thee more,
> Trick thyself out in ghastly imageries
> Of that which Life hath done with, and the clod,
> Less dull than thou, will hide with mantling flowers
> As if for pity?"
>
> (1352-1358)

Gareth and Death close and the latter is cast to the ground. Gareth with one stroke splits the skull covering his head and with a stronger stroke cleaves the helm allowing "the bright face of a blooming boy / Fresh as a

flower new-born" to emerge (1373-1374). Neither Gareth not death is what he appears to be, yet Gareth after his period of proving himself in Camelot's kitchens and his competence at arms in battling the first three figures of the allegory, as well as his humbling experience at the hands of Lancelot, has earned the right to appear as Arthur's noblest knight. His disguise is without pretence. Death is, however, attempting to present himself as something which he is not. He deserves his defeat.

At the comical and anti-climactic end of the idyll the Lady Lyonors and her house make merry over the defeat of Death, and Gareth and Lynette marry. The unity of these two purged and worthy characters is important in Tennyson's overall scheme although even at this early stage in the Idylls the climax of this poem is not as satisfactory as it might be because of the uncertainty of who weds whom:

> And he that told the tale in older times
> Says that Sir Gareth wedded Lyonors,
> But he, that told it later, says Lynette.
> (1392-1394)

The Geraint and Enid Idylls

The Marriage of Geraint and Geraint and Enid were first published as one poem, Enid, in 1859. "The poem was divided into two parts in 1873; and the two final titles given in 1886" (Ricks, p.324). The Geraint idylls are based on Lady Charlotte Guest's 1840 translation of Geraint, Son of Erbin in the Mabinogion.

Although the person most responsible for action in both idylls is Geraint, Buckler calls him a "hangdog hero at best, not crafty like Ulysses or volcanic like Achilles, but confused and laggard" (p.91). His launching of himself at his various opponents is brave, but betokens misdirected energy. He and Pelleas (in Pelleas and Ettarre) make a pair: both rise from sleep, the former to misplaced jealousy, the latter to misplaced trust. Both suspect inappropriately; Geraint Enid, and Pelleas the King. Introspection is not Geraint's strong suit and the sublimated energy from his pomposity (in The Marriage of Geraint) and aggression (in Geraint and Enid) is directed externally, away from his own manifest blindness and weakness. He is a "man

against himself", not heroic, nor imaginative in the way Gareth is (Buckler, p.91).

In spite of his limitations Geraint is not completely lacking in imagination. He does realise that his chivalric vows are capable of spiritual elevation and he shows that subscription to an ideal higher than his own ego is desirable, however limited it may be in him. Geraint after seeing the Queen's lady-in-waiting insulted, and being whipped across the face by the sparrow-hawk's dwarf himself, vows to avenge these insults:

> I will avenge this insult, noble Queen,
> Done in your maiden's person to yourself:
> And I will track this vermin to their earths:
> For though I ride unarmed, I do not doubt
> To find, at some place I shall come at, arms
> On loan, or else for pledge; and, being found,
> Then I will fight him, and will break his pride,
> And on the third day will again be here,
> So that I be not fallen in fight. Farewell.
> (MG,215-223)

Geraint follows the sparrow-hawk, learns of the tournament, meets Earl Yniol and agrees to fight in Enid's name. The rivals, Geraint and the sparrow-hawk, meet, joust, and break three lances before lashing each other with their swords, causing all the onlookers to wonder:

> So twice they fought, and twice they breathed, and still
> The dew of their great labour, and the blood
> Of their strong bodies, flowing, drained their force.
> But either's force was matched till Yniol's cry,
> "Remember that great insult done the Queen,"
> Increased Geraint's, who heaved his blade aloft,
> And cracked the helmet through and bit the bone,
> And felled him, and set foot upon his breast,
> And said, "Thy name?" To whom the fallen man
> Made answer groaning, "Edyrn, son of Nudd!"
> (MG,567-575)

It is only as a result of Yniol's shout that Geraint can find the strength to defeat the sparrow-hawk. Edyrn is sent off to Arthur's court to crave forgiveness of the Queen, and he is also commanded to give back to the earl what is his. To some extent these conditions reflect back on Geraint. What Edyrn is commanded to do about Yniol's property is fitting, but it also means that Yniol and his family are beholden to Geraint, which his later treatment of Enid suggests is a desirable state of affairs for him.

Geraint also attempts to find a rock of faith for himself in the ever widening sea of doubt that surges around. He tells Enid's mother that he wants to be able to know that Enid loves him:

... I thought,
That could I someday prove such force in her
Linked with such love for me, that at a word
(No reason given her) she could cast aside
A splendour dear to women...
.....
...then I felt
That I could rest, a rock in ebbs and flows,
Fixt on her faith. Now, therefore, I do rest,
A prophet certain of my prophecy,
That never shadow of mistrust can cross
Between us.

(MG,804-814)

The irony is, of course, that Geraint has failed to understand that faith starts, as Edyrn's does, internally, and then develops the ability to see things beyond how they affect the individual alone. Even by the time of the supposed resolution of the poem-pair, Geraint's "rock" is not himself but Enid's inexplicable loyalty. He agrees to accept that Enid is true and imposes a vow of silence on himself. Enid's redemption is evident in that she changes from a largely passive, singing doll to a heroine, evoking sympathy and inspiring a dislike of him who caused her distress. She grows more than Geraint, who merely learns to keep his mouth closed.

Geraint's behaviour in insisting that Enid be dressed by Guinevere is more perverted than mere egoism. Geraint has no concern that Enid will arrive at the court dressed like a "beggar from the hedge" (MG,230). This is enough of an indictment on his character, but the reasons he gives the earl "are even more shocking: being a Guinevere figure himself, he wants to make Enid a Guinevere figure" (Buckley 96), and so doing make her the same emotionally static dwarf that he is, and that to some extent the Guinevere of the early idylls is. Besides the stupidity of forcing a relationship of subservience on Enid, his painful, careful plans are charged with irony since once the breath of scandal attaches Guinevere's name to Lancelot's, Geraint feels he must leave the court to extricate his wife from any overflowing scandal that may include her. This has little to do with the preservation of Enid's good name, but is, again, self-referential:

A horror on him,lest his gentle wife,
Through that great tenderness for Guinevere,
Had suffered or should suffer any taint
In nature...

(MG,29-32)

He attempts to keep Enid pure, not by deserving her loyalty, but by removing any possible temptation. Scandal is not all that Geraint, in his insecurity, is concerned about; he is also afraid that Enid will be influenced by the Queen's libidinous ways and that he will be made a cuckold as well as the fool he so convincingly shows himself to be. As the prince (Geraint) and his wife rode out of Camelot

> ...they passed to their own land;
> Where, thinking, that if ever yet was wife
> True to her lord, mine shall be so to me,
> He compassed her with sweet observances
> And worship, never leaving her...
> (MG,45-49)

This chapter of my discussion of the Idylls deals with what, for want of a better name, may be called the spring idylls. The Coming of Arthur is one of the two framing idylls and so serves mainly to introduce Arthur and the predominant themes of the cycle. In Gareth and Lynette Tennyson presents Gareth as a model of what a knight of the Round Table should be. Although even in these early idylls, The Marriage of Geraint and Geraint and Enid, disillusionment has begun to set in, Geraint is a spring-time figure. He, like the uncomprehending Guinevere of the early idylls, fails to understand the true nature of Arthur and his vision. In his immaturity Geraint also attempts to establish links between Enid and Guinevere, as the symbolic investiture of Enid at her arrival at Camelot shows. Guinevere offers to dress Geraint's bride "for her bridals like the sun" (MG,1230). Geraint wants to "bind / The two together" (MG,790-791).

The contrast between the spring-Geraint and Gareth is marked. Besides the wider societal implications of his outward looking, Gareth has an imaginative introspection leading to completeness and maturity, a maturity Geraint cannot match. Any personal growth Geraint experiences is accidental. For Buckler he has "floundered into evil, as he has floundered into good" (p.96).

The yoking of Geraint and Guinevere also foreshadows what will happen when the Queen attempts to break out of her isolated, pedestalled state, elevated, alienated and symbolic as it is. Gareth, an ideal, imaginative, spring-knight is not a Guinevere figure. He has the ability to carry his new-found maturity, and to preserve his imagination, through all seasons. Geraint is not an ideal figure but more of an everyman, and is content to accept blindly

and question no further. He says he "will henceforth rather die than doubt" (GE,744).

In this idyll-pair Edyrn's transformation shows the reader everything that Geraint is not; the two are complementary characters. When welcoming the shamefaced Geraint back from his wasteland quest, Arthur spends scant time on him, but points beyond him to the transformed Edyrn, his society, and all the world:

> ...have ye looked
> At Edyrn? have you seen how nobly changed?
> This work of his is very great and wonderful.
> His face with change of heart is changed.
> The world will not believe a man repents:
> And this wise world of ours is mainly right.
> Full seldom doth a man repent, or use
> Both grace and will to prick the vicious quitch
> Of blood and custom wholly out of him,
> And make all clean, and plant himself afresh.
> Edyrn has done it...
>
> (GE,895-905)

Ironically, when Geraint defeats Edyrn, he becomes the new and equally proud sparrow-hawk. These two hawks represent concurrent dual themes: Geraint represents individual salvation which happens in spite of himself, and Edyrn presupposes and goes beyond this, to an attempted societal reform. Arthur with the purged Edyrn in the vanguard attacks Doorm's bandit hold. But when evaluating the comparative merits of Geraint and Edyrn, Arthur is clear:

> This work of Edyrn wrought upon himself
> After a life of violence, seems to me
> A thousand-fold more great and wonderful
> Than if some knight of mine, risking his life,
> My subject, with my subjects under him,
> Should make an onslaught single on a realm
> Of robbers, though he slew then one by one,
> And were himself nigh wounded to the death.
>
> (GE,911-919)

And Geraint, who has done exactly this, feels "his work was neither great nor wonderful" (919).

Limours and Doorm represent externalised aspects of Geraint's character. Both are crude, overbearing and libidinous. When Limours arrives at Geraint and Enid's lodging, he is introduced as an effeminate, pale and wasted man (GE,275), this description having resonances of the criticisms levelled at the uxorious prince:

> On a sudden, many a voice along the street,
> And heel against the pavement echoing, burst

Their drowse; and either started while the door,
Pushed from without, drave backward to the wall,
And midmost of a rout of roisterers,
Femininely fair and dissolutely pale,
Her suitor in old years before Geraint,
Entered, the wild lord of the place, Limours.
(GE,270-277)

Limours is not a wholly negative figure. He is charming, genial, energetic and vital. He is also hospitable and generous: "And wine and food were brought, and Earl Limours / Drank till he jested with all ease, and told / Free tales..." (GE,289-293). Like Geraint he feels real affection for Enid, even through this is sometimes inappropriately expressed as he talks of Enid being in his power.

Limours, in attempting to win Enid, is "moist" of eye, "wine-heated from the feast" (GE,350). Yniol calls him "a creature wholly given to brawls and wine" (MG,442). Limours merely takes Geraint's vices one step further, as Doorm does.

Geraint, when he first meets Enid, is portrayed as being as libidinous as Limours is, also to some extent as a result of the wine he has drunk:

But after he had eaten, then Geraint,
For now the wine made summer in his veins,
Let his eye rove in following, or rest
On Enid at her lowly handmaid-work,
Now here, now there, about the dusky hall...
(MG,397-401)

Tennyson transposes the Mabinogion's ordering of appearances of Limours and Doorm, possibly for the effect of the semantic and phonetic echoes of Limours - in French, "the mowers", and in Old French "li mours" which means "turf grounds". (Geraint and Enid rest and eat the mowers' course fare in Limours's meadow before they actually meet him (GE,210). Doorm may have some resonance with the word "doom" (Ricks, p.357). Obviously Doorm meets his doom at the hands of Geraint, but there is also some fatalistic irony, not to mention romantic black comedy, in Geraint's leaping up from "corpse to conqueror" (Buckler,p.92).

More than once, Geraint seems a paltry protector of Enid's honour. He shows shock at Doorm's treatment of her and valiantly fights to rescue her from the clutches of Limours, yet he treats her more contemptuously - and contemptibly - than they do, on an underhand emotional level. Nothing is allowed to be explicitly questioned and silence is imposed, as well as the irrational

hardship Geraint thinks necessary for purging his wife of her supposed impurities.

In spite of Geraint's ban on communication, Enid is able to warn him of every imminent attack and of the salient points of the abduction plan that she and Limours make. Enid finds the lack of communication baffling and hurtful. She wants to know why it is that he is "so cloudy and so cold" (GE,48) and longs to know the reason for his anger: "If he would only speak and tell me of it" (GE,54). For Geraint to question Enid directly would not only be more honest but would also confront the imagined problem where it would be most likely to be cleared up. Naturally enough for Geraint, aggression is far easier:

> But evermore it seemed an easier thing
> At once without remorse to strike her dead,
> Than to cry 'Halt,' and to her own bright face
> Accuse her of the least immodesty...
> (GE,108-111)

Enid evokes strong feelings from all the men who have to do with her. The blatant aggressions of Limours and Doorm are made in the name of love. Limours calls Enid "the pilot star of his lone life" (GE l 306). Doorm recognises Enid's beauty and is determined that she should show herself off to better advantage. He is also generous in a perverse way, and is willing to share his earldom with her:

> There is not one among my gentlewomen
> Were fit to wear your slipper for a glove.
> But listen to me and by me be ruled,
> And I will do the thing I have not done,
> For you shall share my earldom with me, girl,
> And we will live like two birds in one nest,
> And I will fetch you forage from all fields,
> For I compel all creatures to my will.
> (GE,621-628)

Doorm is a parody of a patriarch in the animal kingdom. He seeks to "compel" not only Enid but all creatures. He is as mindlessly domineering as Geraint, but without the pretence that Geraint manifests. Doorm is a boor and a beast. He is called "the Bull" (GE,439) by his quaking vassals and has the same idea of leadership as Geraint has: to bludgeon those less powerful than himself into submission. Action takes the place of introspection for both men. Doorm, like Geraint, counts Enid a possession: "Yea, / Eat and be glad, for I account you mine" (GE,646).

What Doorm offers Enid is an ironic parody of what Geraint gives her. Both men seek to feed, dress and make her their own. Geraint seeks to "compass" his wife with "sweet observances" that ensure she is "true to her lord" (MG,48).

Doorm's attention to Enid's clothing is significant. After she refuses his offer of food and drink because she is too upset by Geraint's comatose state, Doorm attempts to understand her motivation:

> Girl, for I see you scorn my courtesies,
> Take warning: yonder man is surely dead:
> And I compel all creatures to my will.
> Not eat nor drink? And wherefore wail for one,
> Who put your beauty to this flout and scorn
> By dressing it in rags? Amazed am I,
> Beholding how you butt against my wish,
> That I forbear you thus: cross me no more.
> (GE,670-77)

The importance of clothing is manifold, and this motif is used in diverse ways. In the first place clothing offers covering and protection against the elements and enemy attack. Geraint seeks armour for his battle against sparrow-hawk and the other knights. Enid, when she has stripped off her veil to use as a bandage to staunch Geraint's bleeding wound, is unprotected from the sun's rays.

Clothing is also movable wealth. Geraint strips the armour off the knights he defeats in self-conscious cavalier fashion to pay his and Enid's way. Yniol and his family escape with only the clothes and jewels they are wearing, and the money they get from selling these supports them through the sparrow-hawk's rule.

Clothing is, of course, a symbol of wealth and social position. Geraint when he sets out on the Queen's quest, wears "summer suits and silks of holiday" (MG,173). Later, when Geraint arrives at the bustling "bourg" he questions an armourer, who has his back to him, as to where he can find accommodation and arms to fight his enemy. To these questions he gets an off-hand answer. Geraint replies to the blacksmith with some spleen. Turning, the blacksmith sees Geraint "so gay in purple silks" (MG,284) and by his clothes recognises that Geraint is a "stranger knight" (MG,286). There is also something improper and comical about Yniol catching Geraint by his two-

golden-appled scarf. Geraint, admiringly observed by Enid when naked in bed and with the coverlet pushed aside, is manly and dignified. He

> ... bared the knotted column of his throat,
> The massive square of his heroic breast,
> And arms on which the standing muscle sloped,
> As slopes a wild brook o'er a little stone,
> Running too vehemently to break upon it.
> (MG,74-78)

But Geraint, "glancing like a dragon-fly" (MG,172) with "a purple scarf, at either end whereof / There swung an apple of the purest gold" (MG,69-70), is not heroic or dignified; he is ostentatious and clownish.

Her old, faded clothing is a source of concern to Enid who has fraught dreams before she goes to Camelot. Once she has been there for some time, however, Enid realises that her fears are groundless. As she puts on her faded dress at the beginning of the wasteland quest,

> She took them, and arrayed herself therein,
> Remembering when first he came on her
> Drest in that dress, and how he loved her in it,
> And all her foolish fears about the dress...
> (MG,139-142)

Naturally enough clothing is also used to enhance beauty. Geraint dresses up Enid to make her beauty vary:

> ...so loved Geraint
> To make her beauty vary day by day,
> In crimsons and in purples and in gems.
> (MG,8-10)

When Enid is out of favour, however, even Limours and Doorm are shocked that he forces the woman he professes to love to wear such unflattering clothing.

Garb is also, understandably enough, used as a distinguishing feature of the sexes. Geraint declares when he sets out on the wasteland quest, "effeminate as I am, / I will not fight my way with gilded arms,/ All shall be iron" (GE,20-22). Contrasted with this armorial hardness is the pathetically colourful "tribe of women" who "flutter in" to Doorm's hall "Half bold, half frightened, with dilated eyes, /... dressed in many hues" (GE,595-597).

Associated with the "tribe of women" is the idea of group identity. The knights all wear armour and bear arms, and this distinguishes them from the women who clothe themselves in gay robes because Doorm loves "that beauty should go beautifully" (GE,680). Enid, because she is not dressed

beautifully, does not fulfil Doorm's specifications as to how beautiful women should dress. Doorm wants her to wear a brightly coloured robe which presupposes a relationship between them, he the protector and she the recipient. This has resonances of Geraint's "crimsons ... purples and ...gems" (MG,10). Guinevere offers to clothe Geraint's bride "for her bridals like the sun" (MG,231), a situation Geraint is happy to exploit so that the balance of power is in his and Guinevere's favour.

Enid's dress is an indication to the outside world of the esteem her husband holds her in. When he is pleased with her he allows her to be "dressed like the sun," but when he is unhappy with her, she is made to don her old and faded dress as a symbol of this. Geraint is conscious of what he is doing. He tells Enid: "Put on your worst and meanest dress" (GE,848). Limours also notices Enid's shabby clothing:

> For, call it lovers' quarrels, yet I know
> Though men may bicker with the things they love,
> They would not make them laughable in all eyes,
> Not while they loved them; and your wretched dress,
> A wretched insult on you, dumbly speaks
> Your story, that this man loves you no more.
> (GE,325-329)

Doorm has similar things to say about Geraint's insulting and unsympathetic behaviour:

> And wherefore wail for one,
> Who put your beauty to this flout and scorn
> By dressing it in rags? Amazed am I,
> Beholding how you butt against my wish,
> That I forbear you thus: cross me no more.
> At least put off to please me this poor gown,
> This silken rag, this beggar-woman's weed:
> I love that beauty should go beautifully:
> For see ye not my gentlewomen here,
> How gay, how suited to the house of one
> Who loves that beauty should go beautifully?
> Rise therefore; robe yourself in this: obey.
> (GE,673-684)

Both show up Geraint and offer to do for Enid what Geraint offers when she is in favour.

Clothing is indicative of the civilising influence of Arthur's court, but the beast does not lurk far away. After Geraint has defeated the knights who seek to ambush him, he strips them of their suits of armour, calling them "dead wolves of woman born" (GE,94). Doorm is "the bull", and Geraint fights

and then becomes the sparrow-hawk. (The idea of the beast in man is an important motif in Balin and Balan, as we shall see.)

The Geraint and Enid Idylls are the only poems in the cycle that have a continuous narrative line. In spite of their obvious narrative unity, it does make sense to talk about a duality of narrative perspectives, The Marriage of Geraint presented primarily through the male, Geraint's eyes, and Geraint and Enid mainly from Enid's perspective.

Buckler sees this male/female disjointedness as being at the centre of the narrative. Just as these poems achieve a unity of male and female perspectives when combined, so Geraint and Enid complement one another. Geraint is much of what is worst, and best, in man: active, courageous and protective, but also aggressive, egotistical, possessive, unimaginative and insensitive. He is counterpoised against Enid: gentle, innocent, passive and also alert, undemanding and unconditionally loving. It seems Geraint has most to gain from the association. Edyrn, the purged villain, gives the formula for completeness at the end of Geraint and Enid: "Gentleness, / When it weds with manhood, makes a man" (866-867).

Both poems see the tormented Geraint, and to some extent Enid, searching to find "what makes a man". This search takes on significant proportions and becomes what Buckler calls a "domesticated epic" (p.90). This does not mean that The Iliad, for instance, is to be compared with the Enid idylls, "though he (Tennyson) certainly wanted to show that his idylls could reach in all literary directions" (p.91).

Geraint's and Enid's inner turmoil is symbolically represented by externals: in the former's case, his antagonists, and in the latter's, the richness or fadedness of her dress which reveals her standing in Geraint's favour.

The duality of narrative perspective is not just in the male / female division. As the plot advances, so does the development of the characters' internal strife. The landscape through which the two pass is an objective correlative of their spiritual state and the state of their relationship. At the lowest ebb of their relationship the jealous husband and the loyal wife

ride through a wasteland of "marches", "bandit-haunted holds, / Gray swamps and pools, waste places of the hern,/ And wildernesses" (GE,29-32).

The reader sees much of The Marriage of Geraint through Geraint's eyes. Geraint embarks on the quest to avenge the insult done to the Queen. He is irritated by the bustle of the hamlet preparing for the tournament, and he is invited into the ruined castle of the old and destitute Earl Yniol where he first hears Enid singing and declares "Here, by God's grace, is the one voice for me" (344). He makes the arrangement with the earl about jousting in his daughter's name, and he, in Yniol's armour, defeats and succeeds the sparrow-hawk. Geraint and Enid is seen through Enid's eyes. She leads Geraint through the wasteland, protecting him from ambush, caring for him when he is wounded and loyally standing by him in Doorm's castle.

The beginning of The Marriage of Geraint acts as a fulcrum. It prepares for the future and explains the past, allowing the shift from male to female perspective, the two presented as two separate interpretations, begging unity, at least in the mind of the reader.

The theme of sense and soul is, of course, central. Buckler calls Geraint the "genital centred male" sense, and "Enid, who is soul, becomes death obsessed" (p.97). Buckler also notes that Yniol and his family offer Geraint the two things he craves most: "flattery of his ego and stimulation of his libido" (p.88). It is too much to say that the passive Enid is saved by Geraint's action, but she does learn from it. Enid's song (347-363) Buckler sees as an inducement to passivity. Gray (1980,p.99), however, sees virtue in the song: it inspires Geraint to love the singer, which is confirmed when he sees her; and Enid declares that fortune is not a matter of the emotions: "Thy wheel and thee we neither love nor hate" (MG,358). However much Geraint is irritated at the nasty tricks he believes fate plays on him, he needs to undergo a period of purgation, and no amount of slicing off of enemies' heads is of any help if his energy is misdirected as it is, outwards instead of inwards. Fortune's wheel, viewed indifferently by Enid, turns inexorably on.

CHAPTER THREE

Balin and Balan

Balin and Balan begins what Priestley (1960, p.177) calls the "second act" of Tennyson's Arthuriad. This idyll is often regarded as the darkest of the cycle, "the most metaphysically despairing". The poem is largely original, only partly founded on book ii of Malory; although as Ricks points out, the theme of Guinevere's guilt and the inclusion of Vivien and Lancelot are original additions (p.375). Tennyson's prose account of the poem, "The Dolorous Stroke" is, according to Goslee (quoted by Ricks p.376), a prose draft; for Staines, however, it is a "recollection of the synopsis of the poem" (quoted Ricks p.376). The idyll was the last written of the cycle (between 1872-1874) and was first published in 1885.

Balin and Balan is the personal tragedy of twins of Arthur's Round Table destroying themselves, indirectly as a result of Vivien's slanderous lies, but directly as the result of uncontrolled passions. The Idyll prefigures the destruction of the entire Round Table, the irrevocable breaking of all ties of fellowship. It is also the "dream of man coming into practical life and being ruined by one sin" (Tennyson, quoted Ricks p.258) - the sin in this case being quite obvious. The poem introduces Vivien, ambivalent representative of evil and hedonistic passion; and Pellam, the ascetic and representative of a decadent and empty religion.

Some themes and motifs particularly emphasised in this idyll are the doppelganger motif with the pairings of various characters, the theme of sinful man as beast, and the psychological exploration of a diseased and fragmented personality. Psychological disintegration is focused on Balin, with the woodsman, the wood-demon, Garlon, Pellam, Vivien and even her squire existing only as "conflicting aspects of Balin's own psyche" (Gray, p.266). These characters are externalisations of aspects of Balin's internal strife. The Idyll genre particularly suits the incorporation of these themes and motifs because it (as discussed in the introduction) traditionally disallows closure.

Balin's association of himself with madness and beasts is of central thematic importance in this idyll and in the cycle. Both madness and beast

imagery are unequivocally negative referents, and are to some extent - at least in this idyll - interchangeable. Balin introduces himself to Arthur as "the Savage" (51), banished because in a fit of ungovernable rage he had half-killed an impolite thrall with a stroke of his gauntleted hand. His shield bears the symbolic representation of his savagery. The crest has a "rough beast" with "langued gules [red-tongued] and toothed with grinning savagery" (192-193). For the most part Balin keeps his heated, destructive emotions leashed with "chained rage, which ever yelpt within" (314). The representation of the Queen's crown which Balin calls the "shadow's shadow" (200) is a symbol of good and of Arthur's court, and allows him to control his otherwise ungovernable fits of madness and violence which are self-destructive, as his brother points out. Balin is mastered by his passion just as Geraint is mastered by his jealousy. When Balin is party to the garden scene (235-275), the overheard meeting of Lancelot and Guinevere stimulates his imagination to create something more than is actually evident. His destructive impulses turn inwards. He says "My father hath begotten me in his wrath" (278) and he dashes off "mad for strange adventure" (284).

After Balin has killed Garlon and hung up his shield bearing the symbol of the Queen (which he thinks he has defamed) he meets Vivien and declares:

> Thither no more! nor Prince
> Nor knight an I, but one that hath defamed
> The cognizance she gave me: here I dwell
> Savage among the savage woods, here die -
> Die: let the wolves' black maws ensepulchre
> Their brother beast, whose anger was his lord.
> (476-481)

The inter-relatedness of unmastered passion and the beast is clear. Balin, because anger was his lord, is a brother to the beasts, the creatures Arthur is determined to eradicate from his realm. Before Arthur claimed the throne,

> And so there grew great tracts of wilderness,
> Wherein the beast was ever more and more,
> But man was less and less, till Arthur came.
> (CA,10-12)

Balin, then, stands for everything Arthur is against. The irony is that after being accepted back into Arthur's court Balin's downward spiral towards his own beasthood is begun. His weird scream after meeting Vivien and being told her "truth" (519) is the scream of the wood-devil, the very beast Arthur has

come to quell and Balin is questing to destroy. Balin's ironically prophetic pronouncement, "To lay that devil would lay the Devil in me" (296) hints at the only way the wood-demon that is Balin can be laid to rest.

The beast image is examined in detail by Engelberg in his article "The Beast Image in Tennyson's Idylls of the King". He says:

> Idyll by Idyll, Tennyson exposes and delineates the inherent characteristics in man and the external conditions of a degenerating society that conspire to lure and tempt man to the sensual and the sensuous life and thus help to quicken his fall from the high ideals of Arthur to the lowest level of brute existence.
>
> (p.287)

Engelberg argues that although the beast image in the idylls is didactic, there is also a measure of unity and dramatic intensity achieved which, he notes, some critics have been inclined to deny. He sees the beast image as working in the same cyclical and unifying way in which the seasonal theme works. Before Arthur comes to power, his future realm is sterile and brute-ridden. When Arthur is proclaimed king by his knights, the beast is ousted, temporarily, and man is in control. In the Geraint and Enid idylls, there are numerous references to the Sparrow-Hawk, which title Geraint actually claims after defeating the villainous Sparrow-Hawk before him, Edyrn ap Nudd. Also there are wolves in Doorm's court, and Doorm and his men are described as dogs growling over bones.

Balin is the savage and Balan leaves Camelot to hunt down the wood-demon in the wilderness of the forest. Both brothers fail, one socially, the other in his quest, but this failure is only on one level. Balin becomes the wood-demon and kills his own brother with the spear that allegedly pierced the side of Christ, and which Balin has removed from Pellam's relic-filled chapel. Balin is killed by a beast as well, indirectly his own loss of control, but directly by his exhausted horse.

Engelberg's article goes on to examine the beast imagery of further idylls, and this is a good opportunity briefly to follow his argument. In Merlin and Vivien, Vivien is constantly described in terms of animals: snakes, birds and even fish. She is an "arch-serpent" (MV,240) engaged on a hunt for Merlin's soul, a "cageling", a "bird / Who pounced her quarry and slew it." Vivien strangely combines the qualities of cat, bird and serpent. Because she perverts the true nature of things, she inverts normal expectations. When she

calls herself a "gilded summer fly" (MV,255) caught in Merlin's old and hoary web, she presents what is the very opposite of the truth - that she is luring Merlin to his doom.

Engelberg notes that after the fiasco of the Grail quest, the symbols of disintegration are those of a pre-civilized society, marking the end of Arthur and civilization. The beasts become mythological and fantasy creatures, without any reality or power except in the imagination:

> ....hornless unicorns,
> Crack'd basilisks, and splintered cockatrices
> And shattered talbots, which had left the stones
> Raw, that they fell from...
> (HG,714-716)

Pelleas also succumbs to the beast in himself when he finds himself betrayed by Gawain and Ettarre:

> Let the fierce east scream through your eyelet-holes,
> And whirl the dust of harlots round and round
> In dung and nettles! hiss snake...
> Let the fox bark, let the wolf yell...
> Fool, beast - he, she, or I? Myself most fool;
> Beast too, as lacking human wit...
> (PE,460-467)

In The Last Tournament, Arthur's knights become a pack of wolves, bickering and squabbling over the prize. Isolt notices the discourtesy of Tristram and calls his rudeness the growing beast. She says: "But thou, through ever harrying thy wild beasts.../...art grown wild beast thyself" (LT,630-632).

Throughout the cycle, Arthur remains the stationary point around which the entire realm and central characters revolve. His last battle is fought within a circle, on a sandy peninsula where the meeting of traitor and King is inevitable: "There the pursuer could pursue no more,/ And he that fled no further fly the king..." (PA,79-80). This eventual meeting of the two forces, civilization and beast, moves towards its inevitable conclusion. Arthur, when he realises that his reign and fellowship are over, says:

> ...all whereon I leaned in wife and friend
> Is traitor to my peace, and all my realm
> Reels back into the beast, and is no more.
> (PA,24-26)

Balin realises his mad frenzies are unhealthy and seeks to lay his madness, not by healing himself but by seeking to project his madness on to external enemies. One means of doing this is to embark on the same quest his brother undertakes. After cleaving the woodman's log and being told about the wood-

demon, Balin says: "To lay that devil would lay the Devil in me" (296).

His doom is due not only to his lack of control, but also to his frenetic and undirected energy which (like Geraint's jealousy already discussed) instead of being used in self-examination and self-purging, is aimed at illusory enemies such as the wood-demon or archetypal forces such as Vivien. As well as his inability to be educated, Balin has what Reed calls "the inability to govern the rudimentary man" (p.134). The point Reed makes is that unruly passions destroy themselves, and in contending with them self-control is necessary to achieve any sort of salvation. There is nothing specifically new or profound about this, but Reed goes on to make the point that only death may extinguish unruly passions. Thus death for Reed, and perhaps in this light for Tennyson, is a means of salvation. Reed's extinguishing of unruly passions by death is not suicidal, but betokens the cancellation of all vitality and is the natural outcome of internal dissension, certainly on the scale on which Balin experiences it (Reed, p.134).

Balin's unharnessed and self-destroying rage is evident when he is party to Lancelot's and Guinevere's meeting; and after he creates his own deluded construct from what he has seen and heard, all perfectly innocent (to an innocent over-hearer), Balin rages:

> Queen? Subject? but I see not what I see.
> Damsel and lover? hear not what I hear.
> My father hath begotten me in his wrath.
> I suffer from the things before me, know,
> Learn nothing; am not worthy to be knight;
> A churl, a clown!
>
> (276-281)

All is beyond Balin's range of influence. There is nothing he sees himself as being able to do about his unstable mental condition. As Reed mentions, Balin's fall is not a <u>felix culpa</u>. It does not lead to a reassessment of his own position. It is easier for him to "rage against external provocation and then to bemoan those violences with ecstasies of self-denigration" (p.133). This he does when he first meets Vivien. His idol, Guinevere, has fallen and he is ready to believe anything about her. He is volatile in mood, bemoaning his fate, wanting to be brother to the beasts, then cursing Guinevere. He is immoderate and unsteady, with no self-control.

Pallen writes that

> the beast in the man, let loose in Sir Balin's breast, awakened by the apprehension of the faithlessness of Guinevere and Sir Lancelot, throws off all restraint under the lash of Vivien's words, and blindly hurls itself and others to destruction.
>
> (p.69)

It is true that Balin's madness is the cause of the tragedy of the two brothers slaying each other, even though this madness is provoked by Vivien. Balin like Camelot, has a beast within him which Arthur controls but does not exorcise completely. Vivien, and what she symbolises, is able to exploit this already existing weakness using the sin of Guinevere and Lancelot, which is the sin of all: uncontrolled passion.

Kozicki (p.134) suggests that Balin's worship system is central to his value system. Balin has to have, or to make tangible, external reminders of his belief system. He takes Guinevere's "crown-royal" (196), the "shadow's shadow" (200), to help him to remember whom he serves. The painted crown becomes the "golden earnest of a gentler life" (204).

When his fit of madness is provoked by Vivien's disparaging remarks about the relationship of Guinevere and Lancelot, Balin's shield is the first to receive the brunt of his spleen. Having first hung it on a tree because he thinks he has "defamed / The cognizance" (477-478), Balin then takes his shield down and tramples on it, letting out the wild cry his brother mistakes for the wood-demon's.

> She ceased; his evil spirit upon him leapt,
> He ground his teeth together, sprang with a yell,
> Tore from the branch, and cast on earth, the shield,
> Drove his mailed heel athwart the royal crown,
> Stampt all into defacement, hurled it from him
> Among the forest weeds, and cursed the tale,
> The told of, and the teller.
>
> That weird yell,
> Unearthlier that all shriek of bird or beast,
> Thrilled through the woods; and Balan lurking there
> (His quest was unaccomplished) heard and thought
> "The scream of the Wood-devil I came to quell!"
>
> (529-539)

The externalisation of Balin's madness and his identification with beasts is so marked that it is true to say that Balin becomes his madness; he turns into the wood-devil his brother is questing to destroy. The motif of the external correlative applies not only to Balin's rages. The landscape too is used as a representative of both the psychological states of individuals and

of the body politic. Types of vegetation and the degree to which it is controlled are used symbolically to indicate something about the nature of the central character, Balin. He overhears Lancelot and Guinevere in the highly cultivated and tightly controlled four-walled garden of Camelot. From this he rushes "mad for strange adventure" (284) along the same track his brother had taken, towards the wilderness of the "skyless woods" (298). Buckler points out that the passion-control analogue is symbolically represented by Guinevere's and Lancelot's associations and positionings in the garden:

> Independent of the special effect witnessing this scene has on Balin with his very distinctive problems, aspects of the scene itself are of fundamental importance. It takes place within a highly cultivated garden, as contrasted with the rugged wilderness which dominates the larger setting of the idyll. Guinevere makes her approach, the sunlight on her face, through a "range of roses," (l 239) while Lancelot emerging from the shadows, paces the "long white walk of lilies" (l 244). The aggressor in the scene is clearly the queen, who chides Lancelot with the disloyalty of ignoring her; and the fact that disloyalty is the one charge he would least be guilty of begins to define his dilemma and complicate the meaning of their relationship.
>
> (p.172).

Lancelot explains his apparently anti-social behaviour by recounting his strange dream in which he sees a "Maiden Saint who stands with lily in hand/ In yonder shrine" (256-257). Guinevere, continuing in her role of aggressor and temptress, declares her preference for the "Deep-hued and many folded" (265) garden rose. But even sweeter than this is "the wild-wood hyacinth and bloom of May" (266). Buckler comments on the irony of this since the hyacinth is a flower commemorating the love of Apollo for Hyacinthus upon whose blossom "woe" is written and which is known as "a symbol of mutability even more transient than rosebuds" (p.172). Lancelot and Guinevere leave the cultivated and Edenic garden, neither of them able to resolve the purity-passion dichotomy.

Goslee (p.267) points out that the garden scene contains much imagery to do with light and darkness, height and depth. Balin's world is a world, says Goslee, of almost Miltonic absolutes. With Balin's crumbling faith in his role model, Lancelot, he is presented with more than a passing doubt; rather with an epistemological quandary of the same sort that Gareth faced: "I suffer from the things before me, know,/ Learn nothing; am not worthy to be knight" (279-280).

What Balin has seen and heard has more to do with his own perception of reality and personal identity than with an insight into the relationship between Lancelot and Guinevere. Similarly, Balin's perception of the various and symbolically coloured flowers, light and dark and height and depth, and the imagery used to describe these, reveal the extent of his psychological disturbance. As a central character in Tennyson's mythopoeic poem, it is necessary that Balin deal with traditionally important mythological concerns such as good, evil, pain and disillusionment. Balin's fault, along with those of other failed characters of the Idylls, is that he lacks the imaginative resources to transcend the sensory. Buckler makes the point that his collapse, and the moral collapse of others such as Pellam, is "not moral profligacy but perceptual incompetence [which] lies at the root of their moral meandering" (p.177).

The emphasis of the idyll is on psychological fragmentation. Goslee quotes Gray (p.266) as saying that the "lack of narrative realism and continuity renders, even the final version, a highly subjective, relativistic work". Gray continues, "in the last written idyll, Tennyson has replaced epistemological distinctions between appearance and reality with the psychological penetration of his hero" (p.266). Goslee does not agree altogether, rightly pointing out that Tennyson attempts to make the work realistic, and that working from the base of the "The Dolorous Stroke", a prose work, Tennyson cut down on coincidence and chance, saw to it that characters, props and settings were better introduced and found sounder motives for all the characters. At the same time he used symbolic echoes of music, height, the sun and colours such the white of purity and the red of passion to provide a subjective framework.

For Reed (p.130), Balin the Savage is the Id (for want of a better name) and Balan is the governing faculty controlling the undisciplined urges of his other half, even to the extent of guarding against his (Balin's) impulse to self-injury. This duality, with each brother representing one aspect of the total man, many critics see as the "doppelganger formula" which surfaces in this idyll in its "most explicit and lurid manifestation" (Buckler, p.171). It is through the doppelganger formula, continues Buckler, that "the coeval

nature of gentleness and violence is fully insinuated" (p.171).

Gray points out that behind the tale of Balin and Balan lies the ancient myth of the Celtic divinities or kings Belinus and Bran (or Brennus). The mother of these two, according to Celtic tradition, is the only one able to unite the two hostile and greedy brothers. These two Celtic figures represent opposed yet complementary principles on both the human and cosmic scale. Interestingly, Tennyson makes this uniting and maternal figure Guinevere. Among Balin's last words are "Pure as our own true mother is our Queen" (606). The doppelganger theme, used as it is within the idyll genre and through the medium of myth, is able to express a whole range of oppositions and resolutions.

In Balin and Balan, fragmentation of personality is one of the major themes and because of the mythological spine that Gray suggests, this idyll "resolves itself more readily into its archetypical constituents than any other" (p.37).

For Kincaid (quoted in Buckler p.257) Balin and Balan shows unnatural and fatal divisions. The brothers demonstrate the divorce of the rational and social man from the private instinctive one. It is this fatal division that is the root cause of the collapse of the Round Table, of which one example is the sin of Guinevere and Lancelot which is representative of the triumph of the instinct (the beast) over rationality (the man). It is for this reason that Arthur's realm "reels back into the beast" and that Merlin can say to Gareth earlier:

> ...the King
> Will bind thee by such vows, as is a shame
> A man should not be bound by, yet the which
> No man can keep...
>
> (GL,265-8)

In Malory the psychological split is not explored much. Malory is not concerned with opposing principal forces which are set in motion opposite each other, either on the psychic or on the cosmic scale, but this is Tennyson's preoccupation. Not only does the idyll kind allow this, but it also allows the exploration of the theme of double and split personalities throughout. The Idyll genre traditionally prevents both closure and judgement on the part of the author and reader. Goslee makes the point that "Tennyson

leaves us with the tragic irony that Balin's final revelation can only be as great as the crime that produces it" (p.268). This is as true for Balin as it is for Guinevere later in the cycle. Balin encounters his brother, not as some nameless antagonist, but as the embodiment of the ideal of courtesy that both Balin himself, and perhaps even the reader, have come to doubt. Death - the end of all opposed forces, as a means of quelling the tension - is at the same time for Balin the resolution that is impossible in life. Balin and Balan are united in death in a way in which they could never be united in life.

The psychic split these brothers embody is just as prominently displayed in another pair of brothers, Garlon and Pellam. Garlon is for both Malory and Tennyson a netherworld figure, a hidden killer. And according to Gray, Pellam is named after a traditional Celtic mythological figure, Pwyll, who became a prince of the underworld (Gray, 1980, p.40).

Both Pellam and Vivien are inevitable in Arthur's Camelot. They are those who set themselves against everything he stands for. Pellam prepares the reader for The Holy Grail which comes at the end of the "second act" in Priestley's division of the Idylls. Pellam's asceticism and celibacy, with his chapel full of relics, represents a spiritually decadent and sterile religion. Pellam's castle is a "picture of the external show of spirituality without its soul" (Pallen, p.68). His chapel becomes, for Tennyson, a warehouse, a decaying repository for a decaying religious system.

Pellam is one further example of externalisation: as the forest is an externalisation of Balin's uncontrolled passion, even madness, so Pellam's religion is represented by shrines and material relics with no evidence of an internal striving after spiritual perfection. Like Balin's shield, Pellam's faith is external. When his idols collapse or are removed as props, not only does his faith collapse, but symbolically in Malory (book i, chap. xliv), his entire castle falls down.

Tennyson's preoccupation with the theme of doppelganger, or psychological fragmentation, is just as prominently displayed in Pellam and Garlon. Significantly, they are brothers in Malory, but in Tennyson Garlon is Pellam's heir; not united by close kinship but expressing contrary extremes.

Pellam is an ascetic to an unnatural degree, and Garlon is licentious. (Ironically Pellam puts his faithful wife from him while Arthur's wife, being what she is, remains in the bosom of the fellowship.) These two characters (Pellam and Garlon) suggest opposite ways of spiritual death.

Kozicki (p.131) takes the parallels and contrasts between characters even further, seeing a clear and convincing pairing in Merlin and Vivien or even Arthur and Vivien. Arthur, as Tennyson makes clear, represents the control of passion which uses it for a higher purpose. Vivien represents the release of passion for natural purpose. The song she sings (334-453) is a "paean... in the interests of savage nature and the sexual fires that animate it. Her prediction [that uncontrolled passion will prevail] is quite accurate, for she speaks from strength, confident in the power of such passions".

I find Vivien's song ambiguous. It is amoral, not immoral, and declares the necessity of at least acknowledging passion. Balin's self-destructive violences come about as a result of his unrealised sexual frustrations. Buckler (p.175) also mentions the ambiguity of Vivien's song and notes that it celebrates an apprehension of the truth that is - however distasteful to idealistic minds such as Balin's and to some extent Arthur's - incontrovertible.

The violent sexual associations the song makes, such as "The wayside blossom open to the blaze", suggest violation (Gray, p.101). The lyric develops on previous lyrics in the Idylls, especially the song sung by Arthur's celebrating brotherhood of knights at his marriage to Guinevere in The Coming of Arthur (CA,481-501). The "fiery flood" of the brotherhood song becomes for Vivien the flame of heaven and hell.

> The fire of Heaven is lord of all things good,
> And starve not then this fire within thy blood,
> But follow Vivien through this fiery flood!
> The fire of Heaven is not the flame of Hell!
> (446-449)

This flame also, somewhat ominously, replaces the rain and sunshine of the earlier lyric. There is a seeming confusion of heaven and hell in Vivien's song, both names holding a key place in the line and being repeated. Vivien names herself as a guide for the knights, to lead them through the "fiery flood", whereas in The Coming of Arthur, the knights had named Arthur as

their leader and had dedicated themselves to follow him.

The sun symbolism in the song is also ambiguous. The sun is clearly a positive symbol for Arthur's knights, but for Vivien it becomes the symbol of something else. Vivien claims that

> This old sun-worship, boy, will rise again,
> And beat the cross to earth, and break the King
> And all his Table.
>
> (451-453)

Just as the sun becomes an ambiguous symbol, so Vivien is not quite as clear-cut a representational figure as she at first glance appears to be. She represents to some extent all women. Her preoccupation with the heat of the flame and the sunlight corresponds, in part, to Guinevere's preoccupation. Both are hedonists. Vivien's sun-worship reminds us of Guinevere in the bower with "the morning on her face" (240).

For Priestley (1960, p.244) Vivien's song echoes Lucretian themes of materialist naturalism. Certainly, as he points out, Vivien's values are hedonistic when she says to her young escort "I better prize / The living dog to the dead lion" (573-574), virtually quoting the "disillusioned wisdom" of Ecclesiastes 9:4: "a living dog is better than a dead lion". Priestley (p.244) claims that Vivien only succeeds where there is weakness to exploit. Without passion's dominance over rationality, Vivien's hedonistic temptations would not be temptations at all.

She is a figure of sinister power, a magician, a witch consorting with Garlon - himself a knight who has the power to go invisible and who is also the sworn enemy of Arthur's court. Although the psychological exploration of Balin dominates this poem, Vivien is a figure of archetypically mythological significance, and for this reason she draws the more fully realised characters into her orbit. Through her influence Balin and Balan clash, and Vivien and Guinevere exemplify two interesting possibilities for the destruction of Arthur's institution by unrestrained passion: Vivien by the evil exploitation of weaker members of the Arthurian community, and Guinevere by moral myopia and lack of control. The pairings and correspondences of Vivien with other characters serve a mythopoeic function. They also serve a psychological function, thoroughly in keeping with the nature of the idyll kind.

Balin and Balan is the turning point of the Idylls. Certainly it begins the downward movement in the poem, for although Balan never doubts Guinevere's innocence, the fact remains that the brothers destroy themselves. Balin does so by his own beast, literally and metaphorically, and Balan must kill his twin brother to fulfil his quest.

Merlin and Vivien

Merlin and Vivien was first published in 1859 as Vivien, the final title appearing in 1870. "The story of the poem...is essentially original, and was founded on...Malory [iv I]" (Ricks, p.393).

Vivien's diabolical nature has already been introduced in Balin and Balan. Ricks notes that the vulgate Romance of Merlin, much of which is translated in Southey's edition of Malory, was familiar to Tennyson. In this work the aggressor is not Vivien but Merlin:

> But Merlin would let her have no rest, but always he would be with her in every place; and ever she made Merlin good cheer, till she had learned of him all manner of things that she desired, and he was so sore assotted upon her, that he might not be from her...
>
> (Quoted Ricks p.393)

In May 1857 Enid and Nimue: the True and the False was set up. The title of this poem makes clear Tennyson's division of complete womanhood. Later, however, the shadowy character of Nimue was divided into two: Vivien, the "evil genius of the Round Table" (Ricks, p.393), and the Lady of the Lake. These characters are kept apart since it would be clearly contradictory to have them appear in the same idyll. Of the two, the less significant character is The Lady of the Lake who makes brief appearances in The Coming of Arthur, Gareth and Lynette, Lancelot and Elaine, and The Passing of Arthur. Her doppelganger figure, Vivien, appears in Balin and Balan, Merlin and Vivien, and Guinevere. Single-mindedness distinguishes Vivien from Merlin, in some ways her most appropriate antagonist, at least on the allegorical level, where intellect, wisdom and experience are unable to resist the sexuality she represents. She is a figure displaying perfect hate. Pallen (p.74) goes so far as to call Vivien the personification of the crime of sense which is warped into the crime of lust and hate. Kozicki (p.131)

also notes that "there are two sides to Merlin, and one of them is Vivien". (The doppelganger motif continues in this poem, in perfect harmony with the idyll genre.) Vivien's confidence is evident when Mark questions her about any fear she might have in going to Arthur's court. Her reply parodies the spiritual wisdom of 1 John 4:18:

> ...fear them? no.
> As Love, if Love be perfect, casts out fear,
> So Hate, if Hate be perfect, casts out fear.
> (39-41)

In contrast with her certainty, Merlin is in a state of flux. He uses words such as "dreams", "poised", and "mist" when referring to his own psychological state. He is deeply melancholic and has premonitions of great disaster. As a result he is unable to commit himself to any one active course. Tennyson glossed Merlin's state thus : "Some loyal souls are wrought to madness against the world. Others, and some among the highest intellects, become the slaves of the evil which is at first half disdained" (quoted in Colley p.103).

Merlin's half-heartedness and lack of faith in Vivien, himself and Arthur is expressly stated after Vivien's song "Trust me not at all or all in all" (398). He acknowledges Arthur as his lord, but Arthur's vision is only half-believed and Merlin himself feels the ebb of name and fame (435). Buckler (p.105) makes the point that Merlin is suffering from "role exhaustion". In the allegorical scheme, Merlin is intellect (in Tennyson's original scheme he was to have represented science) and can no longer participate in Arthur's spiritual vision. He does not have Arhtur's knowledge of the reality of the spiritual quest, and the natural setting, "the wild wood of Broceliande" (2) "before an oak" (3) with a storm about to break, symbolises temptations more fleshly than spiritual.

Merlin is precluded from sharing Arthur's vision. He hails Arthur: "O true and tender! O my liege and king!" (789). Buckler points out that this "eulogy has the tone of a lament of a mystery closed to him [Merlin]" (p.104).

Guinevere is also excluded from sharing Arthur's vision until just before the last battle. Vivien too, in what Tennyson calls "the only pathetic line which Vivien speaks" (Ricks p. 399), declares her inability to dream Arthur's

dream, the spiritual vision granted in various degrees to all humans: "The mortal dream that never yet was mine" (115).

Arthur's vision is an imaginative one denied to both Vivien and Merlin. Both characters are soundly based in the natural world: the descriptions of Vivien in animal terms have already been mentioned. For her, Arthur's knights are not spiritual beings but swine or goats whose burrowings must be "ferreted out" (55), their guilty secrets "snakes within the grass" (33) that can be "stirred until they sting" (36).

Merlin battles against fate which seems to conspire against him to bring him to the end of his usefulness in Tennyson's myth. The minstrel marooned at Tintagel, a "wandering voice.../ Blown into shelter" (8-10), inspires Vivien and Mark to unmask the "monkish manhood" (35) of Camelot. And the descent of the mage's "great melancholy" (187) presents Vivien with her opportunity.

Merlin's mental states are important - as is the psychology of all the characters of the Idylls, since the idyll kind is an examination of individual psychology. Reed (p.54) explains that should the mind and the emotions be controlled by an aspiring imagination, then creation is the result. Such was the case when Merlin built Camelot to music. Melancholy unchecked and sensuality unbridled rob the mind of guidance and shake one's faith in imaginative ideals. Destruction, death and chaos are the result. Reed rightly notes that it

> is less a seduction of the flesh than an undefended ennui of spirit that dooms the magus. As with Balin, it is the inability to control a doubting mood that dooms him. Here is no stand-off, but an outright defeat. (p.136)

The significance for the rest of Camelot of an "outright defeat" of "the most famous man of all those times" (164) need not be spelled out.

Camelot's unhealthy moral state makes Merlin's temptations of the flesh all the more appropriate. He is captured by an aspect of his own wizardry, the comfort of moral stagnation providing some respite from the solitary rigours of his lonely life. There are strong connections in Merlin and Vivien between an excess of knowledge and human sexuality. This idyll, and indeed this cycle, is an adapted continuation of the Christian myth of Adam and Eve. Arthur's realm is brought to its knees as a result of the sinful Guinevere - and Lancelot, of course.

In Tennyson's extended seasonal theme Vivien's seduction of Merlin is metaphorically portrayed by the defeat of hoary winter by the sensual summer, an archetypical fable which functions on both literal and subconscious levels. In keeping with the idyll tradition (discussed in my introduction) outright condemnation or unalloyed sympathy is both difficult and inappropriate.

In Merlin and Vivien there are two figures analogous to Merlin. One is the minstrel of "wandering voice" (9) and the other is the wizard, a "little glassy-headed hairless man" (618). Neither is Merlin, but both are externalised aspects of his character. The latter also functions as a foil to Merlin's lack of single-mindedness. The synecdoche of the disembodied "wandering voice" proclaims the minstrel an artist of language. The creator of songs is dissociated by Tennyson's description of him as merely a voice. The song he sings at Tintagel is sexless, without warmth and passion, concerned as it is with "naked knightlike purity" (11), perfect virgin knight[s]" (22) and "maiden girls" (24).

The "glassy-headed" man is an ascetic solitary, grass-eating and concentrating on one book. He owns no "sensual wish" (626), never "touched fierce wine, nor tasted flesh" (625). Merlin, in response to Vivien's question of whether he is like this man, replies: "Nay, not like to me" (616). Merlin is not as single-minded and he is clearly not indifferent to sensual temptation. Earlier he tells Vivien: "Full many a love in loving youth was mine" (544). Both Merlin and the wizard isolate themselves in the wilderness, but the isolation is all they have in common, not the motivation behind it. The wizard lives in the wilderness because he needs solitude to concentrate on the complex book of charms. Merlin withdraws himself because he wishes to escape from the world of action. Merlin's forest is a continuation of the symbol Tennyson uses in Balin and Balan, the externalised representation of unbridled passion which has undermined all of Camelot.

The wizard of Merlin's legend is "dragged" (638) to a king by force and called on to imprison a beautiful queen so that she becomes the king's sole property. Ironically not only is Vivien trying to imprison Merlin, but he has

to attempt to withstand her sexual temptations. It is by Merlin's art that Arthur is publicly proclaimed king and Guinevere his bride. Arthur's kingship, his relationship with Guinevere and Camelot are all public entities and all owe, in varying degrees, some debt to Merlin's craft, in contrast with the case of the wizard of Merlin's story.

The wizard of Merlin's legend is concerned with language, as is the disembodied "wandering voice" (8) of the minstrel blown into Tintagel for shelter. All we know about this minstrel is that he has a voice. The little hairless wizard, a figure analogous to Merlin, lets nothing distract him from his text, a book that has come down to Merlin. When Vivien demands to read it, he answers:

> Thou read the book, my pretty Vivien!
> O ay, it is but twenty pages long,
> But every page having an ample marge,
> And every marge enclosing in the midst
> A square of text that looks a little blot,
> The text no longer than the limbs of fleas;
> And every square of text an awful charm,
> Writ in a language that has long gone by...
> (665-672)

Not only is Merlin alone able to read the text, but he is quite able to counter all Vivien's temptations expressed in language. She

> let her tongue
> Rage like a fire among the noblest names,
> Polluting, and imputing her whole self,
> Defaming and defacing, till she left
> Not even Lancelot brave, not Galahad clean.
> (799-803)

Merlin's response to these vituperative accusations is to remain unmoved:

> Her words had issue other than she willed.
> .....
> He dragged his eyebrow bushes down, and made
> A snowy penthouse for his hollow eyes,
> And muttered in himself, "Tell <u>her</u> the charm!
> So, if she had it, would she rail on me
> To snare the next..."
> (804-809)

Even the words of Vivien's song fail to have any softening effect on Merlin. He is in no danger from Vivien in the province of language; yet he does half-believe her true, not because of what she says, but of how she says it. Vivien's sensual manipulation of Merlin is a triumph of form over content:

> And Merlin looked and half-believed her true,
> So tender was her voice, so fair her face,

So sweetly gleamed her eyes behind her tears
Like sunlight on the plain behind a shower.
(398-401)

The climax of the idyll, Merlin's eventual imprisonment, comes about not simply as a result of what Vivien says, but it is largely a sexual victory, symbolically expressed in the thunderous and passionate bursting of the storm above their heads.

Her triumph does not result in Merlin's death; he lies in the hollow oak, a natural womb and tomb, "as dead" (967), but more important than life itself is the loss of "use and name and fame" (968), the burden that expresses Merlin's priorities before his seduction. Use, name and fame are inextricably linked with each other and with Merlin's identity. His dark premonition is that Vivien

seemed that wave about to break upon me
And sweep me from my hold upon the world,
My use and name and fame.
(300-302)

Later he tells Vivien that he " will not yield to give you power / Upon my life and use and name and fame" (371-372). After Vivien has sung her song to Merlin, he declares

I felt as though you knew this cursed charm,
Were proving it on me, and that I lay
And felt them slowly ebbing, name and fame.
(433-435)

Merlin's appreciation of fame is not a quest for immortality, but rather an appreciation of the use that fame brings as its concomitant:

Fame with men,
Being but ampler means to serve mankind,
Should have small rest or pleasure in herself,
But work as vassal to the larger love,
That dwarfs the petty love of one to one.
Use gave me Fame at first, and Fame again
Increasing gave me use.
(486-492)

Both Merlin and Vivien see use, name and fame as temporal and relative: Vivien's material and hedonistic, Merlin's functional and social. Arthur's use, name and fame are transcendent and spiritual.

Much of what is learned about Vivien is evident through her songs. Gray notes that

> One of the functions of song is to reveal character in a compressed and economic way. This may be seen in many instances. For Vivien the "cursed charm" she works in her songs is essential to her evil purposes.
> (p.103)

Vivien's love song which she overhears Lancelot singing is one of complex irony, irony emerging not so much from the song itself but rather because of who sings it.

> In love, if love be love, if love be ours,
> Faith and unfaith can ne'er be equal powers:
> Unfaith in aught is want of faith in all.
> (385-387)

From the mouth of Lancelot it expresses the insoluble dilemma of honour and loyalty colliding with honour and love. In Vivien's case her single-mindedness is explained. For her "Unfaith in aught is want of faith in all". This is just as applicable to Merlin who lacks faith in everything (in himself, in Vivien and in Arthur's vision). Lack of faith is the "little rift within the lute" (388) that captures Merlin irrevocably and leads to the eventual destruction of all Arthur's kingdom. The last line of Vivien's song, "So trust me not at all or all in all" (447), is clear in the sense that Vivien is demanding total commitment: complete trust or absolute lack of faith. Merlin's half-heartedness stands in marked contradistinction to Vivien's single-mindedness.

Merlin and Vivien is a more complex poem than a description of "the erotic fluctuations and vacillations of a dotard under the moral and physical manipulation of a prostitute" (Swinburne, quoted in Jump p.321). Vivien's sexual temptations epitomise the depths of moral degradation and because "the most famous man of all those times" succumbs, the moral collapse of the rest of Camelot, his creation, is inevitable.

Lancelot and Elaine

The idyll was first published in 1859 as Elaine, the final title, Lancelot and Elaine, appearing in 1870. The source of the poem is Malory Book xviii chaps.ix-xx.

Even less than the idylls preceding it does Lancelot and Elaine reach a point of closure (unless one sees closure in the narrator's promise that Lancelot should die a holy man). I find Lancelot one of the few true heroes

of the Idylls. Although he muses and dreams, even getting "lost in fancy" (163), he is able to maintain and live with a more complete vision of his complex dilemma, honour rooted in dishonour, than any other character in the cycle (other than Arthur, of course). Hallam Tennyson reported: "My father loved his own great imaginative knight, the Lancelot of the Idylls " (quoted in Gray, 1983, p.348).

In spite of feverish "holy vows and pure resolve[s]" (874), Lancelot does not give himself over to fantasy in the way Elaine does. Arthur notices the "homeless trouble in [his] eyes" (1354) and Lancelot himself recognises his partial responsibility in the death of Elaine and wishes that God would send

> a sudden angel down
> To seize me by the hair and bear me far,
> And fling me deep in that forgotten mere,
> Among the tumbled fragments of the hills.
> (1413-1416)

Lancelot, unlike Elaine and even Guinevere (until she achieves some vision towards the end of the cycle), is a true tragic hero in that he is able to make moral decisions. He is unable to leap from the one catastrophically tragic entanglement of his relationship with Guinevere into a relationship with Elaine based on fantasy and dream.

Elaine and Guinevere are parallel but contrasted characters, like many pairs in the Idylls. Elaine is the lily-maid, the maiden saint of whom Lancelot dreams in Balin and Balan (BB,255), and Guinevere is the "garden rose / Deep-hued and many folded" (265), passionate at the expense of control and perspicacity. These women not only present Lancelot with a choice (made more complex by the fact that the fate of the rest of the Round Table hangs on it); they serve to provide philosophically dichotomous options: Guinevere immoral love and Elaine passionless purity.

Lancelot's dilemma is that no choice he makes can be the right one since both present undesirable elements: if he is loyal to Arthur then he is inconstant to Guinevere, if loyal to Guinevere he is traitorous. And to be loyal to Elaine is to lack integrity and indulge in fantasy, besides the fact that he does not love her.

This is the first idyll in which the relationship between Guinevere and Lancelot is openly spoken about, even to the point of dialogue presenting a

lovers' tiff. As a figure compared with Elaine, Guinevere is not complimented by the association. She emerges as haughty, jealous, unreasonable, selfish and self-centred. All her faults come about as a result of uncontrolled or misdirected emotion. When Lancelot explains his association with Elaine and presents his rich gift of the diamonds to the Queen, she retorts:

> So pray you, add my diamonds to her pearls;
> Deck her with these; tell her, she shines me down:
> An armlet for an arm to which the Queen's
> Is haggard, or a necklace for a neck
> O, as much fairer - as a faith once fair
> Was richer than these diamonds - hers not mine -
> Nay, by the mother of our Lord himself,
> Or hers or mine, mine now to work my will -
> She shall not have them.
>
> (1217-1225)

Guinevere's loss of trust in Lancelot is really self-referential. The spring-figure, passionate and irrational, is as quick to believe Lancelot inconstant as Camelot is to believe the worst of her.

Both Lancelot and the Queen realize their frailty. Guinevere tells Lancelot that in her heart of hearts she "did acknowledge [Lancelot] nobler" (1204), and as Buckler points out (p.117), Lancelot refuses to accept Elaine as paramour less from high moral principles than because he has a commitment to the Queen. Guinevere and Lancelot are both figures representative of Camelot. They are those of whom Merlin said in Gareth and Lynette:

> ...the king
> Will bind thee by such vows, as is a shame
> A man should not be bound by, yet the which
> No man can keep...
>
> (265-268)

Both consciously choose the spiritual second-best, Lancelot being granted a dream vision of the saintly lily-maid (BB,255-263) and not accepting it, and Guinevere being aware of Arthur's spiritual perfection but being unable to accept that.

There is a movement in Lancelot and Elaine from the beast imagery of Merlin and Vivien to a deeper exploration of the individual psyche. In this respect this poem is more delicate and complex than any of the idylls before it. In Balin and Balan, the brothers die in each other's arms to achieve an isolated and belated but satisfactory completeness. But the conflict of Lancelot's loyalties cannot be resolved by death, neither his nor Elaine's. His pain does not make him a purer person, but it does make him a nobler one. Lancelot

is what Kozicki terms a type of "The Martyrdom of Man" (p.148). Striving after spiritual perfection, which he understands he will never attain, he is a model of humankind. He has the opportunity to see that flesh itself is the disguise, the "mortal veil and shattered phantom of that infinite One" (quoted in Reed,p.89).

Lancelot is also, however, a unique individual as are many other characters in The Idylls; Balin, Merlin, Elaine, Guinevere, Pelleas and even to some extent Arthur, must battle for sanity and identity and to maintain belief in a spiritual vision. Only Arthur manages to preserve his vision intact against the various manifestations of evil: pettiness, scandal and loss of faith and honour. Lancelot is more human than any other knight. When confronted with sin he fights it. He maintains a constant war against a mood of despair; he "must strive unendingly against the demons in his own wasteland" (Reed,p.84). Buckler sees Lancelot as a tragic figure: "a protagonist fully capable of a tragic grandeur that, whatever the configuration of catastrophe, cannot whimper and fail" (p.116).

Lancelot's identity is largely the result of his physical prowess. He is the mightiest of all Arthur's knights. When he hides his identity and jousts at the diamond jousts using Torre's unmarked shield, he precipitates the knightly fellowship into factious disharmony. The diamond jousts are founded on the fatal division of two kingly brothers, and this division is taken one step further when the disguised Lancelot is attacked and overthrown by his own kin who are maddened with jealousy:

> But in the field were Lancelot's kith and kin,
> Ranged with the Table Round that held the lists,
> Strong men, and wrathful that a stranger knight
> Should do and almost overdo the deeds
> Of Lancelot...
>
> (468-472)

Ironically, the love token Elaine gives Lancelot is the part of his disguise which convinces his kin that the unknown knight is not Lancelot.

For the knight himself, the masking of his own identity has rather more far-reaching consequences, because it is through his redeeming illness that he is forced to reassess his priorities, however short-lived this reassessment may be. In the face of death the great knight makes

> Full many a holy vow and pure resolve.

These, as but born of sickness, could not live:
For when the blood ran lustier in him again,
Full often the bright image of one face,
Making a treacherous quiet in his heart,
Dispersed his resolution like a cloud.
(874-879)

Lancelot must accept his own impurity. The realisation during his illness of his own imperfection occasions a fundamental questioning of his identity, his name, his social position, his very existence:

For what am I? What profits me my name
Of greatest knight? I fought for it, and have it:
Pleasure to have it, none; to lose it, pain;
Now grown part of me: but what use in it?
To make men worse by making my sin known?
Or sin seem less, the sinner seeming great?
Alas for Arthur's greatest knight, a man
Not after Arthur's heart! I needs must break
These bonds that so defame me...
(1401-1410)

Lancelot's options are either to break the bonds that so defame him or to be uncreated. Death is not what he wants, rather to be forever forgotten and not to have ever existed. This contrasts with Elaine's romanticised idea of the call of death as "like a friend's voice from a distant field" (192). Lancelot realises his position as an example, a force second only to Arthur in power to be used for either unity or division. He knows he is an integral part of a larger design, the honour of which he believes in but which he is unable to live out. Significantly Lancelot's belief, like Elaine's, is never in doubt. In this respect they are both contrasted with Gawain and Guinevere.

Although Lancelot sins far more grievously than does Gawain, it is with Lancelot that our sympathy lies. Gawain is libidinous, irresponsible and thoughtless. Both Arthur and Elaine chastise him, Arthur barring him from ever going on another quest: "Ye shall go no more / On quest of mine, seeing that ye forget / Obedience is the courtesy due to kings" (711-713); and Elaine, weary with his heavy-handed attempts at seduction, eventually protests:

Why ask you not to see the shield he left,
Whence you might learn his name? Why slight your King,
And lose the quest he sent you on...
(649-651)

Gawain's lack of self-awareness and loyalty is contrasted with Lancelot's overwhelming sense of his own sin. When Arthur chastises Gawain, he is silenced "For twenty strokes of the blood" (715), after which he "...shook

his hair, strode off, and buzzed abroad / About the maid of Astolat, and her love" (717-718).

In contrast, Lancelot points out to others that Arthur is the supreme example of the Round Table, that in jousts he, Lancelot, may win prizes, but in actual war Arthur is supreme:

> ...for the king,
> However mild he seems at home, nor cares
> For triumph in our mimic wars...
> Yet in this heathen war the fire of God
> Fills him: I never saw his like: there lives
> No greater leader.
>
> (309-316)

Part of Lancelot's tragedy is that he never does lose sight of Arthur's vision although he is unable to achieve it himself. In the battle of sense and soul, Lancelot wars against himself, he recognises and aspires to the way of the spirit, but the flesh is too weak to allow spiritual victory. Even at his lowest ebb Lancelot can see clearly the vision he believes in but fails to espouse. This presentation of him develops the theme of warring sense and soul in that there is no closure in the idyll, not even to the extent that there was closure in Balin and Balan. Lancelot continues to live a tormented life as a man set against himself.

In the same way that the wilderness externalised Geraint's psychological conflicts, the forest Balin's and the storm Merlin's, so Lancelot's kin externalise his conflict, descending on him like a wild wave to overbear him and bring him to earth:

> They couched their spears and pricked their steeds, and thus,
> Their plumes driven backward by the wind they made
> In moving, all together down upon him
> Bare, as a wild wave in the wide North-sea...
>
> (477-480)

Lancelot as martyr has already been touched on, and his being wounded in the side, Christlike, by his own family, adds to this impression.

Lancelot is a victim of his own myth. After the barge of the lily-maid has floated down the river to Camelot, Lancelot muses on Elaine's tender but wasted love, comparing it favourably to Guinevere's "fear for name and fame" (1389). Lancelot's name is a liability because of the expectations it arouses. He asks himself:" Why did the King dwell on my name to me? / Mine own name shames me, seeming a reproach" (1391-1392).

Both Lancelot and Elaine associate themselves self-consciously with art. Lancelot's speech to the Queen unites various artistic sub-themes as does Elaine's preparation for death. When handing over the nine diamonds to the Queen, Lancelot says to her:

> Queen,
> Lady, my liege, in whom I have my joy,
> Take, what I had not won except for you,
> These jewels, and make me happy, making them
> An armlet for the roundest arm on earth,
> Or necklace for a neck to which the swan's
> Is tawnier than her cygnet's: these are words:
> Your beauty is your beauty, and I sin
> In speaking...
>
> (1172-1180)

The diamonds are symbols. Firstly, they are the prize which Lancelot wins as the best of all knights. They are also a present to Guinevere, a precious token of love and commitment not accepted in the spirit in which they are given and so becoming ominous seeds of disaster. The diamonds isolate and reflect the light of the grandeur of Camelot, but erratically and inconstantly. They are the products of kingly fratricide and the fruit of internal division and so become symbolic parts in the overture to the destruction of Arthur's kingdom from internal strife. Through them Lancelot is nearly killed, Elaine dies and the diamonds themselves are thrown by the irate Guinevere into the river down which the body of Elaine is floating in her carefully prepared barge. Buckler rightly sees this as the climactic point of the poem, uniting the three main characters:

> Thus their three fates come together in a magnificent operatic crescendo. Guinevere rejects the emblems of their nine-year mock marriage. With that rejection go the diamond symbols of Lancelot's fantasy of being a "king's son"; and perspective is given to its transient reality-unreality by the reflection of their reflection in the water.... As Lancelot watches in chastened recognition, Elaine in her nuptial-funeral barge passes, "smiling, like a star in blackest night." Everything suddenly explodes in a concatenation of mirroring and contrasting symbols that orchestrates a grand imaginative illumination that defies ultimate closure: the heat of the sun, the heat of wrath with its brutal sexual overtones, the spectator as both multivisionary and protagonist, the casement as picture frame of art-reality, the river of life, the river of death, the watery reality of another reality that has no lasting reality, the Arabian Nights quality of the "star in blackest night," the Elizabethanism of nuptial love as nuptial dying, and suffusing it all the Mona Lisa-like smile of Elaine, both infinitely fascinating and beyond positive comprehension.
>
> (p.125)

Elaine is an aesthetic creature. The similarity of her fate and the Lady of Shalott's is evident. Tennyson claimed: "The Lady of Shalott is evidently the Elaine of the Morte d'Arthur, but I do not think that I had ever heard of the

latter when I wrote the former" (Ricks, p.388).

There are noteworthy differences: there is no curse in Elaine's case, nor is she physically or culturally isolated as the Lady is, who views the world only through a mirror. Also she actually meets Lancelot. In spite of these differences I think it is helpful to see "The Lady of Shalott" as a poem strongly parallel to the longer and more complex Lancelot and Elaine.

In both cases there is a clear linking of death and love: they cease to be alternatives and become equivalents. In the case of both women peace comes only with death; both move towards a known and accepted doom for which love is to blame. To a greater extent in "The Lady of Shalott", but also in Lancelot and Elaine, there are otherworldly associations. The weary reaper hears the Lady's song and whispers "Tis the fairy / Lady of Shalott" (35-36) and Elaine is called "the Fairy Queen" (1247). The last note of Elaine's song becomes a banshee shriek, and her brothers shudder when they hear it: "Hark the Phantom of the house / That ever shrieks before a death" (1015-1016). But most important of all is that both Elaine and the Lady make aesthetic images of themselves, exploring the art/reality relationship.

Elaine first appears as an isolated figure alone in a tower in a world of her own imaginative fantasy. She fashions a case of silk for Lancelot's shield and imaginatively recreates every "dint a sword had beaten in it, / And every scratch a lance had made upon it" (19-20).

Lancelot and Elaine is more concerned than any of the other Idylls with art and its relationship to life. At the centre of the action is the great diamond of the diamond jousts. Around this the action occurs, like the setting of a jewel. Isolated events are sometimes momentarily isolated, brilliantly illuminated or frozen in time. Elaine thinks of Lancelot's face "As when a painter, poring on a face, / Divinely through all hindrance finds the man / Behind it, and so paints him..." (330-332).

Another instance of Tennyson's interest in the art/life relationship is his description of the carven work of Arthur's chair (434-442 and 547). Elaine's imagined picture of Lancelot has the same frozen-time quality. Lancelot has left "But still she heard him, still his picture formed / And grew between her and the pictured wall" (985-986). So too has the glimpse of Guinevere,

the jealousy-stricken Queen momentarily illuminated, she "who might have seemed her statue" (1164).

Buckler (p.113) notices several other occasions when time is suspended so that detail is emphasised. Lancelot's vision of the lily-maid when she asks him if he will wear her token at the tournament is such an illuminated moment, as is the vision of the hermit's cave outside Camelot (405-410) or Lavaine's sight of the jousting meadow near Camelot (428-31). The same pictorialism is to be found in the description of Lancelot's kin charging down on him, "a wild wave in the wide North-sea" (480), and the description of Elaine's barge (1148-1154) as well as the vision Lancelot has of Elaine as she floats past the open casement "smiling, like a star in blackest night" (1235).

Art becomes for Elaine of sole importance in her life (and her death). Art becomes a fantasy which is for her indistinguishable from reality, allowing her no true experience which would enable her to cope with unrequited love or any of the other vicissitudes of life. The only response open to Elaine when her fantasy is shattered is to retreat into aesthetics herself. Her death, sad as it is, argues an unhinged and perspectiveless mind, self-absorbed and morally irresponsible.

Her meeting with Lancelot is most significant for her on the level of her imagination. As Geraint falls in love with Enid's voice, Elaine is "Won by the mellow voice before she looked" (242). (Interestingly Lancelot is also singing in "The Lady of Shalott".)

Elaine has two dreams. The first (210-215) portends Guinevere's throwing of the diamonds into the river and the second (1038-1041) she makes come true. She tells her brothers: "...this night I dreamed / That I was all alone upon the flood..." (1038-1039).

Elaine makes her dream her reality. She does get the wonder, the musing, the pity and the welcome she desires, but only when she is dead.

Central to understanding Elaine is understanding "The Song of Love and Death" (998) in which she expresses her understanding of the relationship of love, death and art to life. Before she dies she tells Lancelot: "I have gone mad. I love you: let me die" (925). And the twisted, tormented logic of her

song is mad. In it Elaine declares she knows no difference between love and death. Gray (1980,p.104) points out that the rhyming lines of the refrain spell out only one thing: "I...die...I...die".

Although Elaine is a character evoking sympathy there does come a point when her fatalism is simply pathetic. She chooses to die rather than cope with the inevitable pain life brings. In contrast, Lancelot's groaning in remorseful pain is truly heroic and shows Elaine to be more of a love-sick romantic adolescent, irresponsible and uncomprehending, than a true heroine should be. At the same time Elaine is saintly and innocent, ill-equipped to deal with the treachery and deceit of Camelot as represented by Gawain and his attempted seduction. Buckler notes:

> ...though we may sympathize with her [Elaine] at the level of the keenest pain, we must finally draw back and see her as pathetic and morally shrunken and horrifying because to the degree that we yield to her life-art illusion, we are in danger of shrinking too.
>
> (p.116)

In Lancelot and Elaine the purity of the individual is not enough for salvation. The death of innocence is a foretaste of the tragic collapse of the institution of the Round Table.

The Holy Grail

Tennyson called The Holy Grail "one of the most imaginative of my poems" (Ricks p.463). Emily Tennyson records in her journal that on the 9th September 1868 "A read a bit of his San Graal, which he has just begun" (Ibid.) and a mere five days later: "He has almost finished the San Graal. It came like a breath of inspiration" (Ibid.). Emily continues: "He has had the subject in his mind for years, ever since he began to write about Arthur and his knights" (Ibid).

After 1859 Tennyson's progress on the cycle was brought to a halt. After The Holy Grail's publication in 1869, however, he felt able to fill in the blank spaces in the cycle. The Coming of Arthur, Pelleas and Ettarre and The Passing of Arthur followed closely on the heels of The Holy Grail, the design of the cycle completed to Tennyson's satisfaction with the publication of Balin and Balan in 1885.

The Holy Grail is, to my mind, the most symbolically complex of the Idylls and also provides the key to a clearer understanding of "sense at war with soul" (Ricks,p.562). The reality or unreality of the Grail is of small importance since, in keeping with the idyll genre, Tennyson's subjects are the psychological responses of Arthur, Ambrosius, the Holy Nun, Guinevere and the various questers. Staines suggests: "The Holy Grail is a study of the comparative validity of varied responses to this spiritual experience; ultimately, the idyll becomes a study of the folly of rash knights who forsake their 'allotted field' for a distant vision" (p.755).

The Holy Grail is a complex imaginative work which is also an allegorical homily on the relationship between faith and good works and the appropriateness of questing after spiritual states divorced from material reality.

Tennyson's Grail poem clearly has different intentions from Malory's story on the same subject. Tennyson wrote to the Duke of Argyll as early as 3 October 1859 saying "The old writers believed in the Sangraal". In the same letter he wrote, "As to Macaulay's suggestion of the Sangraal, I doubt whether such a subject could be handled in these days, without incurring a charge of irreverence" (Mem 1, p.468). Viewed in the light of the rest of the Idylls, Galahad's vision is, perhaps, not quite as unequivocally glorious as it may at first seem, and Percivale, in spite of his being ranged "close / After Sir Galahad" (307), emerges as a flawed narrator, imaginatively stunted and admitting ignorance.

Percivale is the chief narrator of this idyll. He tells the story not only of his own quest, but also of Galahad's and Bors's quests, as well as of the first vision of the Grail by the Holy Nun. He also directly retells the stories of various other characters. Macaulay points out that Sir Percivale was the original hero of the Grail legend and Ricks notes that by making Percivale the narrator, Tennyson has "given to him and his adventures the chief degree of prominence" (Ricks, p.464). Hallam also reports his father as saying that the key to the poem "is to be found in a careful reading of Sir Percivale's visions" (Ricks, p.464).

This idyll contains several significant recurring images and ideas of fire, the quagmire, repressed sexual energy and eventual sterility. Colley (p.109)

suggests that linked to all of these is one of the recurrent themes of the Idylls: madness.

The quest for the Holy Grail is associated with elemental forces deeply embedded in the human psyche. Buckler notes that Tennyson "must have recognised almost from the start that the grail story, for him, represented spiritual delusion anchored deep in unperceived and unconfessed psychosexual dislocation" (p.51).

The repressed sex-sterility-madness connections in the four central idylls are worth pursuing in more detail. Sterility in various forms develops as a motif in this "act" of the cycle. In Balin and Balan Balin only achieves full self-understanding just before he dies. In Merlin and Vivien, Vivien's entire ploy is to capture Merlin so that he is "lost to use and name and fame". In Lancelot and Elaine, Lancelot cannot love in the way Elaine demands of him and her love for Lancelot leads to her death.

Guinevere and the people of Camelot see the madness of the Grail quest as destroying the fellowship of the Round Table:

> The knights and ladies wept, and rich and poor
> Wept, and the King himself could hardly speak
> For grief, and all in middle street the Queen,
> Who rode by Lancelot, wailed and shrieked aloud,
> 'This madness has come upon us for our sins.'
> (353-357)

For Guinevere, her sin leads her and all of Camelot to "madness". Even Gawain, in spite of his obvious and severe limitations as a quester, isolates the connections of unhealthily repressed sex to madness and sterility:

> ...my good friend Percivale,
> Thy holy nun and thou have driven men mad,
> Yea, made our mightiest madder than our least.
> But by mine eyes and by mine ears I swear,
> I will be deafer than the blue-eyed cat,
> And thrice as blind as any noonday owl,
> To holy virgins in their ecstasies,
> Henceforward.
> (858-865)

Percivale encounters an allegorical representation of domestic sterility in one of the four visions he has during his quest: the maternal figure who falls to dust the moment he touches her. Her house too falls to dust and becomes a broken shed in which there is a "dead babe" (399) which also falls to dust, leaving Percivale alone. For Percivale domesticity as represented by

mother, house and child is insubstantial and provides no respite from his quest.

He sees his final faltering from his quest and vow as the result of the temptation posed by the supplication of the "slender maiden" (581), the only woman he had ever loved even though they "had never kissed a kiss, or vowed a vow" (583). In spite of all Percivale has said of the inherent holiness of the quest, the monk Ambrosius is moved to say:

> ...blest be Heaven
> That brought thee here to this poor house of ours
> Where all the brethren are so hard, to warm
> My cold heart with a friend: but O the pity
> To find thine own first love once more - to hold,
> Hold her a wealthy bride within thine arms,
> Or all but hold, and then - cast her aside,
> Foregoing all her sweetness, like a weed.
> (615-622)

Contrastingly, Gawain's sterility takes the form of moral dissoluteness. Once he has convinced himself that the search for the Grail is not for him, he spends his year in a silk pavilion with "merry maidens". When told of these experiences the king makes no answer, except to say that Gawain is both deaf and blind to "holy things" (866). Interestingly, Gawain is condemned not for dallying with maidens, but because he cannot see any fault in his moral position.

Of all the characters portrayed in The Holy Grail the true tragic hero is Lancelot. He goes temporarily mad in his effort to live in both the world of spirit and the world of sense. Arthur is the only one who manages to combine completely the two worlds. Percivale retires, Ambrosius longs, Galahad sails off to the distant spiritual city and Bors sees a comfortable pink vision of the Grail as it floats past. Only Lancelot battles in vain to live in two worlds. Percivale reports asking Bors: "Where is he? hast thou seen him - Lancelot?..." (637). Bors answers: "He dashed across me - mad,/ And maddening what he rode..." (638-639).

Lancelot's quest for the Grail is both a quest for an end to the madness his duality causes and an illustration of that duality. He calls the Grail "The Holy Cup of healing" (652) but his vision is clouded by the very things he seeks to cure: his "grief and love" (653). Even when he tells Arthur of

his experiences, Percivale notes the "dying fire of madness in his [Lancelot's] eyes" (768). Lancelot is aware of this. He tells Arthur:

> And in my madness to myself I said,
> "I will embark and I will lose myself,
> And in the great sea wash away my sin."
> (801-803)

The fire of passion, in Lancelot's case sexual infidelity, is the one sin that undermines the Arthurian vision requiring a fusion of sense and soul. It is the knowledge of the guilt of such sin that clouds Lancelot's vision of the spiritual, and Percivale's misguided guilt about his own sexual urges which clouds his understanding of his own humanity. Lancelot is tormented to madness, and Percivale, Galahad and the holy nun develop a cult of virginity. The sublimated sexual energy generated from the association of the members of this cult with each other is directed towards sterile spiritual goals and away from concerns of the world.

The motif of fire is associated with sexual love and madness but is also seen in Arthur's fears of the wandering fires of the quagmire (320). Later we read of the eschatological fires of Galahad's dreamlike climb up the hill that "none but man could climb" (489). Bors follows a fire and is told by the "Paynim amid their circles" that the only fire is the one "Whereby the blood beats, and the blossom blows,/ And the sea rolls, and all the world is warmed" (668-669). This is the pagan primal fire of life, the ancient animating force of the universe.

The quasi-Pentecostal flames that announce the arrival of the Holy Grail in Camelot's hall suggest to Arthur that this spiritual vision could consume his hall and fellowship "In unremorseful folds of rolling fire" (261). Lancelot has visions of similar Pentecostal flames in his climactic vision of the Holy Grail which he sees in his madness; a surrealistic and symbolic spiritual vision unconnected with the material world:

> Then in my madness I essayed the door;
> It gave; and through a stormy glare, a heat
> As from a seventimes-heated furnace, I,
> Blasted and burnt, and blinded as I was,
> With such a fierceness that I swooned away -
> O, yet methought I saw the Holy Grail...
> (838-843)

In the old Grail legends Percivale is the hero who is vouchsafed a vision of the healing cup. Later his position is usurped by Galahad, the virgin boy-

knight. Tennyson, however, chooses Percivale for his narrator. The entire idyll is set within Percivale's conversation with Ambrosius, a homely and deceptively simple monk. It is Ambrosius who asks Percivale why he left the Round Table:

> ...and now
> Tell me, what drove thee from the Table round,
> My brother? was it earthly passion crost?
> (28-29)

All visions of the Grail, all experiences and report-backs and even the king's summary of the tragic quest and its consequences, are filtered through Percivale's consciousness. Choosing any single narrator to tell so complex a story would inevitably skew it, but Tennyson makes sure that the reader is aware that Percivale is a flawed narrator and in many cases unreliable.

Ambrosius asks Percivale if the Grail is "The phantom of a cup that comes and goes?" (44), at which Percivale ironically assumes a measure of outrage:

> Nay, monk: what phantom?...
> The cup, the cup itself, from which our Lord
> Drank at the last sad supper with his own.
> (45-47)

Yet Percivale has seen an imperfect vision of it: he tells Ambrosius that he returned to Arthur's hall "Glad that no phantom vext me more" (538).

Percivale is unwilling to become involved in material life. He answers Ambrosius's question of what drove him from the Round Table, whether it was "earthly passion crost" (29), by saying, "Nay... for no such passion mine" (30). Twice we are told that Percivale "Had passed into the silent life of prayer" (4) and that he resolves "To pass away into the quiet life" (735).

He gives up the love that is offered to him by the slender maiden; in spite of this Percivale tells how his heart "Went after her in longing" (582). This contrasts strongly with Percivale's king, Arthur, who desires to be joined in matrimony with Guinevere which Arthur sees as a harmonious union of the spiritual and physical:

> What happiness to reign a lonely king,
> Vext - O ye stars that shudder over me,
> O earth that soundest hollow under me,
> Vext with waste dreams? 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. But were I joined with her,
> Then might we 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,81-93)

Percivale is an ambivalent virgin. The tragedy of his predicament is that he fails to achieve the balance of material and spiritual that Arthur sees as vital, as does Bors (and Ambrosius in his humble way). The supplication of the slender maiden and her people to Percivale, "be as Arthur in our land", he has not the perspicacity to recognise for what it is: the greatest of all possible callings in the world. Percivale in his confusion ironically inverts Arthur's words, seeing the slender maiden's proposal as a temptation and a wandering fire (598) and the quest as where his attention should be. Then feeling like a thief in the night, and in torment, the uncomprehending Percivale tells how he

...rose and fled,
But wailed and wept, and hated mine own self,
And even the Holy Quest, and all but her [the maiden];
Then after I was joined with Galahad
Cared not for her, nor anything upon earth.
(607-611)

Percivale condemns himself to pain because of the attempted negation of his humanity. The last line of the above quotation also invites suspicion as to his suitability as a quester after the spiritual. Clearly Percivale lacks sympathy and selfless love.

Using Percivale as narrator, Tennyson allows the reader to be aware of the three distinct options that are open to Arthur and his subjects. Firstly there is the option of Percivale, Galahad and the holy virgin nun who all abnegate worldly responsibility and live a cloistered life apart from the rest of humanity - like the persona of the Dramatic Monologue "St. Simeon Stylites", which Leigh Hunt called "a powerfully graphic, and in some respects appalling satire on the pseudo-aspirations of egotistical asceticism and superstition" (quoted in Ricks, Vol 1, p.594). Hunt's observations could, with a little modification, be applied to the three characters mentioned.

Gawain's libidinous response is equally unbalanced. He becomes obsessed with the fleshly concerns of life. Once he determines that the quest is not for him, he allows himself to become interested in only the material, rejecting the spiritual outright.

The third, and clearly the most desirable option in the light of Arthur's final speech, is a balanced blending of material and spiritual, attempted with greater and lesser degrees of success by Arthur, Lancelot, Bors, and Ambrosius, who sums up this harmonious conflation of sense and soul by saying:

> For we all want the warmth of double life,
> We that are plagued with dreams of something sweet
> Beyond all sweetness in a life so rich...
> (623-625)

To some extent Ambrosius serves the same function in this idyll that the young novice serves in Guinevere. Ambrosius often forces Percivale to state explicitly his motivation for doing what he does. This, of course, serves to focus the important issues for the reader. Ambrosius shows the gaping loopholes in Percivale's argument and how Percivale, in spite of his pain, has misunderstood himself and the significance of the story he is telling. He interrupts Percivale's tale six times to ask questions about the Grail and the various knights' responses to it. He first asks what the Grail is, to be told by Percivale that it is the cup of healing, yet that it has failed to heal him is all too evident. Ambrosius then asks who first saw the Grail; what Arthur's response was to the visitation of the Grail; why it is that such a holy and spiritual object removes the quester from the world of men and makes him an outcast, a viewer of nothing but phantoms; and why the vision of the Grail is indeed so holy if it brings nothing but unhappiness to those who seek it, and loneliness and disappointment to those who have been left behind. Ambrosius finally asks whether Percivale and the other questers actually learned anything from the quest, and whether Arthur was right about those on the quest chasing wandering fires. Humble figure as he is, it is clear that Ambrosius is just as important to the reader's perspective on The Holy Grail as is Percivale.

Ambrosius also functions as a foil to Percivale's unbalanced and unhealthy sexlessness, sharing more of the Arthurian vision than does Percivale and certainly more so than Galahad. He has not only humility, but also an understanding of himself and his fellows far beyond the understanding Percivale and Galahad show.

Before asking Percivale about the people he met during his quest, Ambrosius tells him of his own need for contact with people; that after reading of miracles and marvels which make his head swim (546), he then delights himself

> ... with gossip and old wives,
> And ills and aches, and teething, lyings-in,
> And mirthful sayings, children of the place,
> That have no meaning half a league away:
> .....
> [I] Rejoice, small man, in this small world of mine,
> Yea, even in their hens and in their eggs -
> O brother, saving this Sir Galahad,
> Came ye on none but phantoms in your quest,
> No man, no woman?
>
> (553-563)

Ambrosius's modest vision and sincerity give him the ability to bridge the void between spirituality and materialism that Percivale is unable to do. His ability to understand and accept his human needs changes the light in which Percivale's quest is seen, making it harsher and less forgiving.

As a result of his self-awareness Percivale often inflates his own importance. This is clearly evident in the words of the hermit who tells Percivale "O son, thou hast not true humility, / The highest virtue, mother of them all..." (445-446). Evidence of Percivale's lack of holiness is given by other subtler clues. One of them is the self-consciousness of the parenthesis when he is reporting Arthur's disfavour of the quest: "'...What are ye? Galahads? - no, nor Percivales'/ (For thus it pleased the King to range me close/ After Sir Galahad)" (306-307).

Percivale also displays adolescent one-upmanship. He tells Ambrosius that he "sware a vow before them all" (195) and presumptuously explains to Arthur that had he, Arthur, been there he would have also sworn the vow to follow the Grail (278). Moreover he constantly stresses his relationship with Galahad, as though some of Galahad's supposed glory rubs off on him from the association. When describing Galahad's first hearing about the vision of the Grail, he attempts to make Galahad a member of his family. He says:

> ...and this Galahad, when he heard
> My sister's vision, filled me with amaze;
> His eyes became so like her own, they seemed
> Hers, and himself her brother more than I.
>
> (139-142)

This self-reported connection appears at various stages in the narrative, another such instance occurring after the final tournament before the knights

set out on the quest. Percivale proudly reports people shouting "Sir Galahad and Sir Percivale" (337).

Percivale's quest is, as far as Buckler is concerned, an attempt to find his identity: "Percivale does not know that he does not know [sic] that he exists, is unconsciously trying to fill an identity vacuum with role playing" (p.60).

Besides the reference to the failure of the relationship of Percivale with the only woman he ever loved, his other glancing allusions to women give evidence of an unhealthy attitude towards them. He tells Ambrosius how the vision of the Grail

> Drove me from all vainglories, rivalries,
> And earthly heats that spring and sparkle out
> Among us in the jousts, while women watch
> Who wins, who falls; and waste the spiritual strength
> Within us, better offered up to heaven.
> (32-36)

The four allegorical visions Percivale has are simple enough. The first vision of the brook and apples falling to dust is of what Percivale perceives as the unimportance of exclusively physical appetites. The woman, house and dead child represent, in Percivale's mind, the futility of domesticity; the jewels symbolise the hollowness of material wealth; and the splendid warrior the emptiness of personal fame. More interesting is the continuing motif of the landscape as an externalisation of inner sterility. After each vision falls to dust, Percivale is left alone vaguely wandering "in a land of sand and thorns" (390, 400,420,437) representing the barrenness, dryness and pain he experiences, having little idea of his own identity and not sharing or even understanding Arthur's vision.

Percivale's awareness lacks perspective. Even at the high point of his quest, just after the tournament, he says:

> And I was lifted up in heart, and thought
> Of all my late-shown prowess in the lists,
> How my strong lance had beaten down the knights,
> So many and famous names; and never yet
> Had heaven appeared so blue, nor earth so green,
> For all my blood danced in me, and I knew
> That I should light upon the Holy Grail.
> (361-367)

As Buckler (p.62) points out, this contrasts markedly with Arthur's vision in The Coming of Arthur:

Thereafter - as he speaks who tells the tale -
When Arthur reached a field-of-battle bright
With pitched pavilions of his foe, the world
Was all so clear about him, that he saw
The smallest rock far on the faintest hill,
And even in high day the morning star.
(94-99)

Buckler (p.63) continues: the key words in such a comparison are Percivale's "appeared" contrasted with Arthur's "was". The difference in vision between Percivale and Arthur is the difference between appearance and reality.

Several times during his narrative Percivale damns his own spiritual vision. He calls all men and women "phantoms" (565); and he blindly gives up the opportunity of being "as Arthur" (605) in order to follow a calling for which he was never intended, and a course which he believes to be the way of salvation. Since he lacks the capacity to commit himself unconditionally to any one belief, he cannot believe in or know himself. The sight of Galahad crossing the great swamp fills Percivale with his own doubts; he "Yearned / To follow" (506-507) but could not.

The most ironic statement in the Holy Grail is the last sentence that Percivale utters: "So spake the King; I knew not all he meant" (916). Percivale's tragedy is, however, that he does not know the full extent of his lack of knowledge.

It is important that Tennyson establish Percivale as a flawed narrator because it is Percivale's perception of Galahad as the hero of this idyll that must be questioned. The first discordant note in his idealisation of the youth occurs in his account of Galahad's disturbing fanaticism in throwing himself into the Siege perilous:

...Merlin called it "The Siege perilous,"
Perilous for good and ill; "for there," he said,
"No man could sit but he should lose himself:"
And once by misadvertence Merlin sat
In his own chair, and so was lost; but he,
Galahad, when he heard of Merlin's doom,
Cried, "If I lose myself, I save myself!"
(172-178)

There is little doubt that Galahad is a pure and sincere knight. He is the antithesis of all Gawain represents. But he overbalances in the opposite direction. For Galahad there is no synthesis, no fusion of sense and soul. Galahad's hysteria and egocentricity are clear when he responds to Arthur's

question: "What go ye into the wilderness to see?" (287). His response, besides being disrespectful (this is the only time in the Idylls that anyone is presumptuous enough to bring Arthur down to the level of the common knight), is repetitively and shrilly self-referential:

> Then Galahad on the sudden, and in a voice
> Shrilling along the hall to Arthur, called,
> "But I, Sir Arthur, saw the Holy Grail,
> I saw the Holy Grail and heard a cry -
> "O Galahad, and O Galahad, follow me."
> (288-292)

The same self-conscious repetitiveness and even more spiritual one-upmanship is evident when Galahad meets Percivale in the Hermit's chapel:

> When the hermit made an end,
> In silver armour suddenly Galahad shone
> Before us, and against the chapel door
> Laid lance and entered, and we knelt in prayer.
> And there the hermit slaked my burning thirst,
> And at the sacring of the mass I saw
> The holy elements alone; but he,
> "Saw ye no more? I, Galahad, saw the Grail,
> The Holy Grail, descend upon the shrine:
> I saw the fiery face as of a child
> That smote itself into the bread, and went..."
> (457-467)

Galahad then proceeds to tell Percivale how the Grail has been a constant guide, always with him night and day, allowing him to dominate any adversity by force, to shatter customs, to bear down pagan hordes and make them his (481). And, with what seems unpalatable condescension and pride, he continues:

> But my time is hard at hand,
> And hence I go; and one will crown me king
> Far in the spiritual city; and come thou, too,
> For thou shalt see the vision when I go.
> (481-484)

Percivale goes to some trouble to emphasise his close relationship with Galahad and there is a hint of the unhealthy cult of virginity and repressed sexual energy in his description (in words corresponding to those used to describe the nun's inspiring of Galahad) of the hypnotic power of Galahad's eyes:

> While thus he spake, his eye, dwelling on mine,
> Drew me, with power upon me, till I grew
> One with him, to believe as he believed.
> (485-487)

Brashear (quoted Buckler p.269) argues that the Grail is not a thing to be discovered but a state to be achieved. Galahad goes on the quest already

having seen the Grail, and does not develop spiritually any further. Always he is seen through Percivale's skewed perceptions; never does the reader enter into Galahad's consciousness. In terms of Tennyson's usual psychological explorations in the idyll kind, Galahad is a failed, or at least severely limited, character. Lancelot, Bors and even Percivale at first, find their way back to Camelot, but Galahad is lost to the remote "spiritual city". Colley points out that Galahad's removal to this remote city is a removal from life (as in Percivale's retreat to the cloisters), and even though Galahad and Percivale show some spiritual purity it is of a self-serving and sterile type, unlike the community-serving spirituality of Arthur, Ambrosius, Bors and Lancelot. Tennyson in a gloss on the poem points out that "religion in many turns from practical goodness to the quest after the supernatural and marvellous and selfish religious excitement" (Ricks p.463), which seems to apply with very little modification to the attitudes of the nun, Galahad and Percivale.

The nun's "deathless passion" (163) inspires Galahad who in turn inspires Percivale to "selfish religious excitement" (Buckler p.55); and her hysterical religiosity and unhealthy erotic asceticism are also shared by them. Of this elite and sterile cult of frenzied virgins, Buckler writes:

> It is impossible to ignore the overtones of witchery and ravishment in this cabalistic ceremony in which defenceless youth, through its own availability, is raped by an embodied Psychosis old and desperate in experience, divesting him of his own identity and, in a strange symbolic inversion of the sexual act, planting the seed of herself in him. Even if one strips down the rhetoric somewhat, the symbolic event remains intact.
>
> (Buckler p.55)

The transference of the nun's fervour through the "deathless passion in her eyes" (163) engenders in Galahad her belief, so "he believed in her belief" (165). In an identical and equally unhealthy symbolic act, the mania is passed on to Percivale.

It is of this passionate and elevated clique of zealous maidens that Gawain dismissively says:

> I will be deafer than the blue-eyed cat,
> And thrice as blind as any noonday owl,
> To holy virgins in their ecstasies,
> Henceforward.
>
> (862-865)

That Gawain is discredited as an uncommitted and libidinous quester himself does not remove the germ of truth in his criticism.

Lancelot and Bors are the heroes of The Holy Grail. They too see "according to their sight" (871) but they both return to Camelot, their spiritual vision divorced from material practicalities. Both are suffering men. It is Bors who, Ambrosius remembers, "spake low and sadly at our board" (698), and who responds to Arthur's questions saying: "'Ask me not, for I may not speak of it: / I saw it;' and the tears were in his eyes" (755-756). Just as Galahad is excluded from close analysis, so too is Bors. Tennyson never allows the reader to penetrate Bors's consciousness, but allows Percivale to narrate everything from his understanding of events.

Unlike those of Percivale and the unnamed knights of Arthur's court, Lancelot's quest is not an attempt at a short cut to spiritual perfection. Lancelot searches for "The Holy Cup of Healing" (652) and his entire quest, like the landscape through which he travels, is both an externalization of his anguish as well as a symbolic representation of the process of self-realisation. Lancelot's madness, the madness Bors mentions when he sees Lancelot dashing across his path, and the madness Percivale reports seeing in Lancelot's eyes, is the result of attempting to synthesise the apparently contradictory conceptual schemes expressed in his symbolic confession to the hermit:

> ...but in me lived a sin
> So strange, of such a kind, that all of pure,
> Noble, and knightly in me twined and clung
> Round that one sin, until the wholesome flower
> And poisonous grew together, each as each,
> Not to be plucked asunder; and when thy knights
> Sware, I sware with them in the hope
> That could I touch or see the Holy Grail
> They might be plucked asunder.
>
> (769-777)

Like Galahad but with less pride, Lancelot is willing to lose himself to find himself. He embarks on a boat he finds anchored to the naked shore, and says "I will embark and I will lose myself / And in the great sea wash away my sin" (802-803). His climb up the thousand steps is prophetic. His striving after self-understanding, humility and purity is a process, not an immediate revelation. His surreal visions and experiences strip him, progressively, and call for constant affirmation of his determination to view the unveiled truth

of the Holy Grail. He passes between the "two great beasts" (818), externalisations of the beast within him, and loses his sword so that he stands not only in pain but defenceless. It is after these acts of utter humility that Lancelot, in the second climax of the poem, hears the "sweet voice singing in the topmost tower" (831) of Carbonek, and sees the veiled Grail surrounded by awful angels.

Although Galahad is widely regarded as the hero of The Holy Grail, we should bear in mind Tennyson's note that in 1859 he had in mind a "poem on Lancelot's quest of the San Graal" (Ricks p.463). Lancelot is the developing character of this central "act" of the Idylls, undergoing a process of redemption and purging, the account of which is consistent with the psychological nature of the genre.

Buckler sums up what I believe: that Lancelot is not the purest or worthiest knight, yet is the most deserving and perceptive of Arthur's subjects:

> Thus the Holy Grail emerges, not just as one of Tennyson's "most imaginative poems," but as one of the most imaginatively complex and profound poems in English. In it, Tennyson dismantles the metaphoric and fideistic imaginative stereotypes that he had inherited from earlier literary usage, anchors the experience deep in varied coordinates of human nature, and saves from the ruins of his gently relentless imaginative iconoclasm, ironically but unmistakenly, the redemption of the order's mightiest knight, Sir Lancelot.
>
> (p.66)

Clearly then, and fully in keeping with the idyll genre, the Grail is a psychological-spiritual phenomenon, an instrument betokening synthesis, but also the reflection of each quester's expectations and weaknesses. Each has a vision of what his mind projects. Tennyson has taken a story about an objective spiritual phenomenon and, characteristically for this cycle, made it a subjective reflection of each quester's spiritual state. The quest for the Holy Grail is not a short-cut to perfection but a life-long and painful climb such as Lancelot experiences.

Of Arthur's speech concluding The Holy Grail, Tennyson said it is "intended to be the summing up of all in the highest note by the highest of human men" (qouted in Norton edition, ed. Hill, p.374). It is significant that Tennyson stresses Arthur's humanity, for Arthur, Lancelot, Bors and to some extent Ambrosius accept the superiority of the spiritual to the physical, but also accept the world of men as the proper stage for redeeming action. Arthur, when

he hears of the first imperfect vision of the Grail, questions his knights about what they expect the Grail to be. At this point, as well as in his concluding speech, he stresses the worldly duties of the knights, recalling Merlin's and Lancelot's motif of use, name and fame. Arthur calls his knights men

> With strength and will to right the wronged, of power
> To lay the sudden heads of violence flat,
> Knights that in twelve great battles splashed and dyed
> The strong White Horse in his own heathen blood...
> (308-312)

In his final summary of the misguided spirituality of the Grail quest, Arthur mentions his own understanding of worldly responsibility:

> And some among you held, that if the King
> Had seen the sight he would have sworn the vow:
> Not easily, seeing that the King must guard
> That which he rules, and is but as the hind
> To whom a space of land is given to plow.
> (899-903)

To Arthur, moments of transcendent spiritual immortality are part of the natural world: of day and night, earth, light, his hand and his foot. His fusion of sense and soul is not a result of questing but of understanding himself and the nature of humanity. He concludes by saying that the Grail vision is a projection of the spiritual onto the world of the material, but there is a clear understanding that vision can only be reality when seen from the base of self-knowledge:

> Let visions of the night or of the day
> Come, as they will; and many a time they come,
> Until this earth he walks on seems not earth,
> This light that strikes his eyeball is not light,
> This air that smites his forehead is not air
> But vision - yea, his very hand and foot -
> In 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: ye have seen what ye have seen.
> (906-915)

CHAPTER FOUR

Pelleas and Ettarre

Pelleas and Ettarre, based on Sir Pelleas and Ettarre (Malory Book iv, chaps. xxi-xxiv), was written and published in 1869 to be followed within three years by The Passing of Arthur, The Last Tournament and more significantly by Gareth and Lynette - which most critics regard as its idyll pair. Pelleas and Ettarre and Gareth and Lynette have clear similarities. These idylls contrast the fortunes of two young, inexperienced and idealistic knights. For Gareth the spring season is propitious as he finds love at the hands of the sceptical damsel Lynette. Pelleas, however, arrives in Camelot when the season of Arthur's visionary might is over and his untested optimism cannot withstand the effects of Vivien's poison and Modred's malevolence.

Tennyson spoke of Pelleas and Ettarre as being "almost the saddest of idylls. The breaking of the storm" (Ricks, p.491). Pelleas' idealism is inappropriate and misplaced. Like a spring flower in bleak autumn it withers and dies. He represents a false dawn, a visionary and insubstantial morning star that reels into smoke, breaks into flames and falls (508).

The idyll gives the first instance of the destruction of innocent members of the Round Table. Neither Pelleas nor Ettarre is wholly to blame for the consequences of their ill-fated association. Both are victims of a noticeable change in the moral "seasons" that affects all of Camelot.

Both Pelleas and Ettarre and Gareth and Lynette have as one of their central themes appearance and reality. In the former, Pelleas' nobility is concealed by his apparent callowness; and in the latter poem Gareth's knave-like appearance belies his chivalric disposition. Gareth is an idealistic young knight who wins Lynette's love and loyalty by being true to his vows. Pelleas incurs the hate and anger of Ettarre by being as youthful and innocent as Gareth. The difference is that Pelleas is a Gareth in an age when Gareths are obsolete (Buckler, p.67). Gareth's idealism prevails and flourishes in the spring-time of idealism and he wins Lynette. Pelleas, however,

fails when faced with Ettarre's malicious and corrupt conduct in a decayed Camelot.

Clearly Tennyson intends the reader to have sympathy for Pelleas who is obviously a positive figure. He comes to Camelot from the "barren isles" (18) and brings with him "the sweet smell of the fields" and "the sunshine" (5-6). He is determined to be a knight. He says to Arthur "Make me thy knight, because I know, Sir King,/ All that belongs to knighthood and I love" (7-8).

Pelleas does know all that should belong to knighthood and it is a sad irony that his untested chivalric principles in a soured and corrupted Camelot should lead to his eventual cynicism and bitterness. To feel only sympathy for Pelleas because he is a wronged knight is, however, too simplistic a reading. Pelleas's love has no focus. The destruction of his innocence by its confrontation with experience in the shapes of the whore Ettarre and the libertine Gawain, is not merely a case of good defeated by evil any more than the Holy Grail is merely a poem about the foolishness of following spiritual visions. The reader is asked to put an artistic distance between himself and Pelleas.

He has conceived a series of unreal and impossible expectations and that he is to be disappointed is inevitable. In a half-state between wakefulness and sleep he lies in a green forest:

> And since he loved all maidens, but no maid
> In special, half awake he whispered, "Where?
> O where? I love thee, though I know thee not.
> For fair thou art and pure as Guinevere,
> And I will make thee with my spear and sword
> As famous - O my Queen, my Guinevere,
> For I will be thine Arthur when we meet.
> (39-45)

His declaration at this point in the cycle is jarring. There has been a growing body of evidence that Lancelot and Guinevere are involved in an adulterous relationship and that this relationship is the ulcer poisoning all of Camelot: there are Vivien's accusations in Balin and Balan, hints in Merlin and Vivien, the pain of Lancelot's confession in Lancelot and Elaine, and Lancelot's admitted "poisonous sin" in The Holy Grail. The explicit similarities between his situation and Arthur's give the tragedy of Pelleas as betrayed, and Ettarre as faithless, a wider social significance. Pelleas is an

anachronism. The news of Camelot's scandal has not yet reached his "barren isles".

He is finally undermined, however, not only by Camelot's scandal, but by his own sexual inexperience. As in the Holy Grail, Tennyson couples sex with various other motifs of a destructive nature: madness, beasts and sterility. Pelleas comes to Arthur's kingdom without any knowledge of women. When he first meets Ettarre he is rendered inarticulate; he stammers and cannot make any reply:

> For out of the waste islands had he come,
> Where saving his own sisters he had known
> Scarce any but the women of his isles,
> Rough wives, that laughed and screamed against the gulls,
> Makers of nets, and living from the sea.
> (82-86)

The Spenserian allusion to the "damsels errant" (6) gives the effect of a stylised medieval dream. Pelleas quite literally chooses the first woman he sees, to whom he devotes all of his youthful passion and chivalric zeal. His vision of Ettarre's party is similar to an episode out of a Medieval romance, except that in Tennyson's cycle the time of Medieval romance is over in Camelot and has been replaced by spreading decay and the disillusionment with which the reader has become familiar by this point in the Idylls. Of primary importance to the effectiveness of Pelleas and Ettarre is its positioning in the idyll cycle. Pelleas' quest to be the perfect knight is unrealistic and impossible to sustain in Arthur's sickened kingdom.

Pelleas' personal tragedy is sexual betrayal. It is not Ettarre's scorn that brings on his madness but the proof of her faithlessness. The news of the Lancelot-Guinevere affair caps the matter. Their sexual liaison leads Pelleas to the conclusion that all those associated with the Round Table are dishonourable liars and that even the king is false. After discovering Gawain and Ettarre asleep together he asks Percivale:

> "Is the Queen false?" and Percivale was mute.
> "Have any of our Round Table held their vows?"
> And Percivale made answer not a word.
> "Is the King true?" "The King!" said Percivale.
> "Why then let men couple at once with wolves.
> What! art thou mad?"
> (522-527)

From his disillusionment with the sexual impurity of the woman he has randomly chosen to be his lover, to his learning of the scandal of

the entire court, is a short and, for Pelleas, necessary logical step. After hearing the news of Lancelot and the Queen, he rushes off in a mad frenzy to see the hall that Merlin built and groan: "Black nest of rats,... Ye built too high" (544).

Gray (1980,p.108) has already been quoted as saying that the songs associated with the various characters give a compressed understanding of their identity, and this is certainly true in the case of Pelleas. The song that haunts him is one that has been sung before the Queen: "A Worm Within the Rose"; a song that has as its subject sexual infidelity. The association of the rose with Guinevere is one she herself makes. When Lancelot tells her of his dream in which a lily is held by a beautiful maid, Guinevere replies: "Sweeter to me...this garden rose / Deep-hued and many folded!" (BB,264-265).

Pelleas' song is, of course, also applicable to the situation in which he finds himself with regard to Ettarre. The relevance is equally clearly broadened to include Lancelot and Guinevere and underlines the fault of all the Round Table: those who are guilty of allowing sense to dominate over soul.

Both the rose motif and the red-white colour motif noticed by Buckley (p.183) continue with Pelleas stumbling through Ettarre's red and white rose garden overgrown by brambles, which are symbolic of Pelleas' confused emotion. The symbolism of redness acquires an added intensity when we realise later that Pelleas, mastered by his passion, has become the Red Knight (Tennyson's note to LT,70; Ricks, p.511). The red and white roses are metaphoric symbols of Pelleas' passion and purity. Another metaphoric symbol is the wave that thunders up the beach and delivers Arthur to Merlin's waiting arms in The Coming of Arthur. At the stage of the cycle reached in Pelleas and Ettarre the force of the wave has diminished. Pelleas crosses the court and walks through the rose garden

> and found,
> Here too, all hushed below the mellow moon,
> Save that one rivulet from a tiny cave
> Came lightening downward, and so split itself
> Among the roses, and was lost again.
> (413-418)

Tennyson makes the Pelleas-Lancelot parallel obvious. Both

knights are driven to periods of madness by their unfulfilled sexual passion. Lancelot in the Holy Grail metaphorically masters his by passing between two lions that guard the entrance to Carbonek. Pelleas, however, like Balin, is destroyed by his own ungoverned emotions.

I suggested, when discussing Gareth and Lynette, that Gareth is a type of all readers, willing to trust Arthur's ways and vows and depend on Merlin's magic. It seems logical to ask if Pelleas serves this same function, since there is such a close and intended pairing in the two idylls. Evidently Pelleas' story is not just of the psychological explorations of a man who has sadly, even tragically, misplaced his love, but an indication of the consequences of a naive and simplistic interpretation of the evidence that surrounds him (and, of course, all readers).

Until line 500 the narrative deals almost exclusively with Pelleas and his private tragedy. The revelatory and symbolic dream which the narrator describes removes the focus from Pelleas alone, however, and makes the consequences of his short-sightedness cosmic. Pelleas sleeps

> Till shaken by a dream, that Gawain fired
> The hall of Merlin, and the morning star
> Reeled in the smoke, brake into flame, and fell.
> (507-509)

His apocalyptic dream broadens the reference of his story just as the magical gates Gareth had to enter expanded the meaning of his story. In both cases the knights are representative figures. When Gareth enters the gates of Camelot he is going into a world that has reality only in his imagination and which cannot be judged on physical criteria alone. In Pelleas' case his vision is one of personal tragedy, and in the universal context of Tennyson's mythopoeia, universal destruction. Not only is everything he stands for falling, but the entire cosmos bursts into flame and falls.

Pelleas reminds one of Elaine in that both are unhappy and desire their own deaths as a result of their unrequited love. Pelleas allows himself to be bound and brought before Ettarre because, he says, "Else must I die through mine unhappiness" (324). The movement of

revelation towards inevitable agony is the movement towards the recognition of the worm within the rose.

Pelleas, in his attempt to be a perfect knight, is not led by a spiritual ideal. Inappropriately he invests his love and knightly devotion in Ettarre, mistaking courtliness for courtesy in his innocence. When he finally understands that he has made a whore his idol, he loses not only his chivalric code but also his identity, which he has based entirely on his romanticised understanding of the Arthurian ideal. Pelleas becomes mad. Like Lancelot he condemns himself for his misplaced love and like Balin he turns his rage inwards against himself, which undermines all that is most noble in himself: his love. He says after he has discovered Gawain and Ettarre together:

> For why should I have loved her to my shame?
> I loathe her, as I loved her to my shame.
> I never loved her, but I lusted for her...
> (473-475)

Although Pelleas is not a true tragic hero with the self - awareness Lancelot has, he does evoke sympathy for his inherent, albeit naive, goodness. His soliloquy after discovering the two traitorous lovers in the third tent makes this evident, although his judgement is subjective. He does understand the magnitude of the disaster that has overtaken him, not only his own personal unhappiness but also his awareness of the corruption of the Round Table.

After Lancelot has defeated Pelleas, he says to him "Rise weakling" (570) and in a sense Lancelot is right, Pelleas is a weakling. When he is faced with the knowledge of his betrayal by Gawain, Pelleas responds by slinking away from the naked and entwined couple like one guilty himself. The visions on which he has been living, once shattered, allow him to salvage nothing from their shards. Tennyson in a rare moral aside implies that Pelleas runs away from "What he fears/ To cope with" (429-30):

> Back as a coward slinks from what he fears
> To cope with, or a traitor proven, or a hound
> Beaten, did Pelleas in an utter shame
> Creep with his shadow through the court again...
> (429-432)

Pelleas is like a latter-day Adam wandering in a garden of Eden overgrown by brambles and filled with serpents. He is confronted by

the sin of concupiscence and falls from grace, losing his capacity to love, which is replaced by a self-destructive guilt. Pelleas loses use, name and fame and finally even his will to live. After he is defeated by Lancelot he shrieks at him: "Slay then... my will is to be slain" (567). And when he is asked by the Queen if she can be of any help, he answers "I have no sword", the symbol of his masculinity and the tool of his chivalric honour. Finally Pelleas, after his conversation with the Queen, springs "from the door into the dark" (591).

By removing himself from the faded light of Camelot, Pelleas gives some indication of what he is going to become: the Red Knight (LT,70), hopeless and without any guiding principles. Pelleas is tested and found lacking. Ironically, he has believed Ettarre is testing him:

> "These be the ways of ladies," Pelleas thought,
> "To those who love them, trials of our faith,
> Yea, let her prove me to the uttermost,
> For loyal to the uttermost am I."
> (202-205)

Ultimately he is destroyed completely: unhorsed by Arthur, he falls into the mud of a mire and is trampled to death by the knights of the Round Table, while all his followers are massacred and his tower is fired (LT 454-479). Pelleas repudiates all that makes a knight civilized and becomes a beast. Tennyson allows a glimpse of the approaching madness when Pelleas, in his frenzy, speaks of the wolf yell and the fox bark (463). Significantly Pelleas meets his demise in a mire, not in noble and honourable combat.

The sin of sexual impurity is the ostensible cause for the disruption of the Round Table, and in this poem the inevitable conclusion of sexual immorality is reached. For the first time the formerly secret scandal of Lancelot's and Guinevere's affair is openly spoken about. Ettarre says to Guinevere, who has just rebuked her on her "unsunny face" (173) and her surliness towards Pelleas who had won her the circlet:

> "Had ye not held your Lancelot in your bower,
> My Queen, he had not won." Whereat the Queen,
> As one whose foot is bitten by an ant,
> Glanced down upon her, turned and went her way.
> (175-178)

This is the first time in the cycle the Queen has ever been accused to her face of infidelity, and it shows clearly the extent of the disintegration of the Round Table.

Pelleas attempts to support all his ideals of what chivalry should be by using imaginative constructs. These are, inevitably, found to be wanting. The moment he understands that Ettarre is unworthy of his chivalric adoration and love, his entire value system collapses. Ettarre represents to Pelleas what Guinevere's crown represents to Balin when he takes this symbol as all-important. Both knights use symbols instead of control, and lack understanding of what Arthur's vision entails.

In his idealism and repression, Pelleas loses both his value system and his identity. Instead of battling on against adversity he simply rejects everything including himself. When Lancelot asks him his name, he replies: "no name, no name,... a scourge am I / To lash the treasons of the Table Round" (553-554). Lancelot repeats his question and Pelleas mentions not only his own loss of identity but also his intention of destroying everything around him (558). Pelleas also inverts Merlin's and Lancelot's refrain of use, name and fame, stating that his name is wrath, shame, hate and evil fame:

> "I have many names," he cried:
> "I am wrath and shame and hate and evil fame,
> And like a poisonous wind I pass to blast
> And blaze the crime of Lancelot and the Queen."
> (555-558)

Lancelot, who has to battle through the same problem of loss of identity, is the knight Tennyson chooses to give Pelleas a fall. ("Tennyson himself considered Lancelot an outstanding type of the hero in man" [Gray,1980,p.124]).

The parallel between Pelleas and Gareth (among others) is balanced by a similar relationship between Ettarre and various other leading women in the Idylls. Ettarre is the femme fatale who lures Pelleas to his doom.

She is everything Pelleas is not. She is profoundly cynical, especially about love. She thinks: "this man loves, / If love there be" (299-300). In spite of this, Ettarre, when she measures her craven and incompetent knights against Pelleas, cannot help noticing his nobility and power. (She seems certain that he will win the

tournament.) When Pelleas has been bound for the second time, she

> ...gazed upon the man
> Of princely bearing, though in bonds, and thought,
> "Why have I pushed him from me? this man loves,
> If love there be: yet him I loved not. Why?
> I deemed him fool? yea, so? or that in him
> A something - was it nobler than myself? -
> Seemed my reproach?
> (297-303)

Pelleas and Ettarre reverse roles. Pelleas begins the idyll by being an idealistic and hopeful knight who arrives at Camelot out of season, and Ettarre is, at the start of the idyll, a unfeeling and unprincipled harlot. Pelleas is a fundamentalist, even a fanatic, and Ettarre an agnostic. They converge and exchange roles, leaving him disillusioned and without belief in himself or anything else, and her with an embryonic love that, if the moral climate permitted it, could well have spelt her redemption. As it is, she merely changes ideological places with Pelleas who believes in a love that is his doom, and she, when realising his worth, is left to a love that is her doom.

Tennyson does not present Ettarre as unambiguously bad. She shows some twinge of conscience shortly after the tournament when she says:

> "Damsels - and yet I should be shamed to say it -
> I cannot bide Sir Baby. Keep him back
> Among yourselves."
> (182-184)

By the time Pelleas has broken down her defence of cynicism and impurity, he is no longer within her reach. She has killed all hope in him (295). Pelleas disarms her and then leaves her to her tragic and inextricable plight. Ironically this whorish woman of "ever-veering fancy" (483) presumably dies as a result of her love, like the lily-maid Elaine who dies as a result of her love for Lancelot:

> And he that tells the tale
> Says that her ever-veering fancy turned
> To Pelleas, as the one true knight on earth,
> And only lover; and through her love her life
> Wasted and pined, desiring him in vain.
> (482-486)

Ettarre is not libidinous because she enjoys it, but because she despairs of the authenticity of genuine love and assumes the role of whore as self-protection against her vulnerability. She is intimidated by the vision of someone nobler than herself. For her, as it will eventually be for Pelleas, it is easier to get rid of the vision of someone nobler than herself than it is to live out such a

life. She, Gawain and even Pelleas himself cannot live with the knowledge of the true Arthurian vision before them, since the ambience of Camelot does not encourage or even allow it. It is easier for Ettarre simply to push Pelleas from her than it is for her to live her life according to Arthur's vision. Pelleas and Ettarre deals with a superficial level of external appearances where courtliness supplants true courtesy and virtue. There is little genuine self-doubt in this poem, and as a result neither main character can be said to be redeemed. Nor is there real self-questioning; in Pelleas' case he merely turns his anger inwards, ranting against a source of private injury. And although he is made aware of the wider significance of his disillusionment, he makes no effort to stem the more important universal tide of discontent.

In spite of the psychological nature of the poem, both characters are used by Tennyson as representative of masculinity and femininity. Buckler sees the sword and the circlet as "quietly distanced" psychosexual symbols of male-female fulfilment giving this poem all the subtleties and refinements of the Holy Grail (p.66).

The end of the idyll sees Pelleas, he who brought "the sweet smell of the fields" and made the "sunshine [come] along with him" (5-6), he who sees the "sweet star, / Pure on the virgin forehead of the dawn" (494-495), having a vision of the morning star that would no longer shine but instead "Reel'd in the smoke, brake into flame, and fell" (509).

Pelleas, the final vigorous symbol of Arthur's chivalric order, is left

> without faith or hope or love or identity or instrument of service, nameless and swordless; his so ardent progress from "son of Pan" to strict and perfect knight has ended by hurling him into cosmic chaos of recriminatory self- destruction.
> (Buckler,p.75)

The Last Tournament

Tennyson first thought of writing a poem on Tristram and Isolt in 1859. The Last Tournament was, however, finally begun in 1870 and finished in 1871 (Mem.2, p.104). Charles Tennyson notes that the germ of the poem is to be found in the prose draft of Gareth and Lynette.

"The bare outline of the story and of the vengeance of Mark is taken from Malory viii-x" (Ricks, p.508) but the figure of Dagonet, although taken from Malory, is developed by Tennyson to function thematically. Charles Tennyson notes that "my father often referred with pleasure to his creation of the half-humorous, half-pathetic fool Dagonet" (Ricks, p.509).

The Last Tournament develops various narratives particular to it: it interweaves the narrative explaining the advent of the Tournament of Dead Innocence and the history of the child Nestling. Interspersed with these stories is the departure of Arthur and the young knights to punish the hate-filled Red Knight, and the victory of Tristram in the lists.

Tennyson explores the pyche of the main character of the poem, Tristram, who is a miniature reflection of the state of the whole of Arthur's realm. The idyll kind is particularly suited to the cameo treatment of Tristram's dream, which occurs simultaneously with various other episodes in the narrative weave. Constant flashback and interrupted narrative describes the destruction of the Red Knight, his tower and the violent death of all his followers, which happens at the same time as Tristram's visit to Queen Isolt in Tintagil and Arthur's return to view the eloquent darkness of Guinevere's bower and to stumble on Dagonet sobbing on the stair-well.

Dagonet, Arthur's fool, is partly responsible for the unity of the poem. His debate with Tristram, arguing for the value of Arthur's vows and the moral culpability of those who break them, helps to create the atmosphere of ever-deepening funereal and autumnal solemnity and concentrates the pathos, making the end of the poem subtle and complex instead of evoking the feeling that Tristram is merely punished as he deserves to be. By the end of the idyll one does not so much condemn Tristram's callous infidelity as see him, and the women he betrays, as victims of the malaise of the Round Table.

The setting for the various narrative threads is all over Arthur's kingdom; the fool dances like a withered leaf in Camelot; Tristram dreams in the woods of Lyonesse; Arthur and his knights destroy the Red Knight in the northernmost reaches of the kingdom. Tristram goes to the western shores of Tintagil to meet Isolt before the narrative

moves back to Camelot and Arthur's return from his campaign against the Red Knight; yet all the narrative links in the chain are united by the temporal span of a few days.

The spuriously philosophical debate between Tristram and Dagonet enables the reader to identify the cause of the rot in this idyll and the whole cycle. The argument seems to be conducted on an intellectual level but is in fact rather a confrontation of two diametrically opposed ethical views, much of the poem showing the degradation of Tristram and his moral position, and the corresponding elevation of Dagonet and his faith. Interwoven is the annihilation of the Red Knight and his followers. The climax of each narrative thread is carefully aligned so that the idyll moves from one climactic scene to the next, ending with the death of Tristram.

On the subject of the interwoven narrative Gray makes the point that "owing to the nature of a serial and the widely spaced entries and exits of the actors, the reader is constantly called upon to take an active part in the drama" (1980, p.124).

One of the central events in this poem is the Tournament of Dead Innocence, the irony of the title being apparent even to the characters within the poem. The pun on Dead Innocence (the death of innocence in Camelot) is made a joke by the courtly wits:

> ...the morning of a tournament,
> By these in earnest those in mockery called
> The Tournament of the Dead Innocence,
> Brake with a wet wind blowing...
> (134-137)

The most obvious link this idyll has with the one preceding it is the presence of Pelleas, although in The Last Tournament he is not called not Pelleas but the Red Knight. Tennyson in his note, but not in the text of the poem, makes clear that both names apply to the same person (Ricks, p.511). It is significant that Tennyson keeps the identity of the Red Knight vague in the text. Both Arthur and the young knights of the Round Table recognise the Red Knight. When he speaks Arthur "knew the voice; the face / Wellnigh was helmet-hidden, and the name / Went wandering somewhere darkling in his mind" (454-456).

Yet the young man who tells Arthur that he knows "All that belongs to knighthood" and that he loves (PE,8) is a far cry from the fiend

who maims the unfortunate churl, sending him back to give his message of hatred to the king. The Red Knight instructs the churl:

> Tell thou the king and all his liars, that I
> Have founded my Round Table in the North,
> And whatsoever his own knights have sworn
> My knights have sworn the counter to it - and say
> My tower is full of harlots, like his court,
> But mine are worthier, seeing they profess
> To be none other than themselves - and say
> My knights are all adulterers like his own,
> But mine are truer, seeing they profess
> To be none other; and say his hour is come,
> The heathen are upon him, his long lance
> Broken, and his Excalibur a straw.
> (77-88)

The Red Knight's perversity in making blatant the hidden flaws in Arthur's court is consistent with what is known of Pelleas's rigid literalness. As Buckler (p.144) suggests, it is this very literalness that eventually breaks his "boyish-mannish" spirit in the first place.

Finally the demise of the Red knight is as violent and brutal as his treatment of the swineherd has been. This is significant on several levels. It serves to reduce the young knights of Arthur's court to the same level of brutality as the Red Knight himself. After Arthur alone has challenged him, the Red Knight overbalances and falls head-heavy into the mire. The young knights

> ...roared
> And shouted and leapt down upon the fallen;
> There trampled out his face from being known,
> And sank his head in mire, and slimed themselves:
> Nor heard the King for their own cries, but sprang
> Through open doors, and swording right and left
> Men, women, on their sodden faces, hurled
> The tables over and the wines, and slew...
> (467-474)

The imagery in this episode is overwhelmingly primal. The elements of blood, water and fire are spilled and mingle; passion is allowed to grow out of control. By the end of the brutal slaying of the Red Knight, in spite of the brutality he himself has shown, there is no doubt that the Round Table is on the verge of collapse. Tennyson gives a rare description of Arthur's emotional response: "But in the heart of Arthur pain was lord" (485).

The creation of the parallel but opposed Round Table of the north is a continuation of the self-destructive impulse that saw Pelleas spring from the "door into the dark" (PE 591). In spite of his brutality the Red Knight and his followers are not being anything

other than what they appear to be: unprincipled, violent and controlled by passions. Their one merit is that they are not hypocrites. The condemnation the Red Knight levels at Arthur's court has a validity even Arthur is forced to admit.

Besides the brutality of the killing of the Red Knight, there is other evidence of the corruption of the noble vows of the Round table, Lancelot's included, of which Arthur is aware. When he delegates the task of presiding over the tournament, Lancelot's reluctance is noted:

> Is it then so well?
> Or mine the blame that oft I seem as he
> Of whom was written, 'A sound is in his ears'?
> The foot that loiters, bidden go, - the glance
> That only seems half-loyal to command, -
> A manner somewhat fallen from reverence -
> Or have I dreamed the bearing of our knights
> Tells of a manhood ever less and lower?
> Or whence the fear lest this my realm, upreared,
> By noble deeds at one with noble vows,
> From flat confusion and brute violences,
> Reel back into the beast, and be no more?
> (114-125)

Lancelot, although beset by guilt the night before the tournament, ascends the double-dragoned chair the next morning with "slow sad steps" (143) and is so distracted by his ennui of spirit that he sees "the laws that rule the tournament / Broken, but spake not" (160-161). Lancelot is afflicted with the same moodiness and despondency as Merlin was. Trapped and distracted by his lust, he is powerless to discipline or end the lawless tournament.

Dagonet is made mock-knight by Gawain and court-jester by Arthur, and although he has neither the scope nor the depth of Merlin nor the faith and vision of Arthur, his sincerity is more than a match for the unfocused and atheistic Tristram. He has a belief in Arthur's vision and Merlin's magic, the quality of belief singularly lacking in Tristram. This makes Dagonet an unanswerable debating opponent. Buckler sees the difference between them as the difference between wit (reason) and wisdom (faith). For Dagonet harmony is equated with wisdom and discord with faithlessness (Buckler, p.296).

At the very core of the debate is the theme of harmony. Dagonet opens the idyll dancing "like a withered leaf before the hall" (4). When Tristram plays his harp Dagonet stands as "quiet as any water-sodden log" (253). When Tristram demands to know why he does not

dance to his (Tristram's) music, he replies that Tristram has broken the music of Arthur:

> For when thou playest that air with Queen Isolt,
> Thou makest broken music with thy bride,
> Her daintier namesake down in Brittany -
> And so thou breakest Arthur's music too.
> (263-266)

What started off as a quip becomes for Tristram a clearly felt and serious challenge of his ethical position; he replies in serious register explaining that he believes the glory of the Round Table is over and thereby insinuating his blamelessness in breaking his vows:

> Fool, I came late, the heathen wars were o'er,
> The life had flown, we sware but by the shell -
> I am but a fool to reason with a fool -
> (269-271)

Tristram returns to the attack telling the fool that he (Dagonet) is mocked by the other knights because he is the only one true to Arthur, the "sole follower of the vows" (303). Dagonet dances to a tune different from the one Tristram can hear or play. Despite Dagonet's swine-like past he is redeemed by Arthur who allows him something on which he can fix his belief. Dagonet tells Tristram:

> I have wallowed, I have washed - the world
> Is flesh and shadow - I have had my day.
> The dirty nurse, Experience, in her kind
> Hath fouled me - an I wallowed, then I washed -
> I have had my day and my philosophies -
> And thank the Lord I am King Arthur's fool.
> (315-20)

Dagonet introduces the Orpheus-Eurydice myth in which Orpheus pipes his wife out of hell; Tristram gleefully seizes on this, implying that he too can use music to charm people out of hell. In a final coup Dagonet says that what Tristram is doing is precisely the opposite:

> And wither harp'st thou thine? down! and thyself
> Down! and two more: a helpful harper thou,
> That harpest downward!
> (330-332)

In spite of Dagonet's moral victory he is still the fool, a mock knight, a "withered leaf". He betters Tristram but also ironically emphasises the irreversible decay of the realm, since he has no power to reverse or stop the rot; he is, after all, only the fool and is expected to act foolishly in spite of his wisdom. Tristram, the hero of the tournament, is aware of the decay of Arthur's fellowship but is, like Lancelot, too weak to rectify or arrest it. Dagonet is the

only tiny model of redemption in the design, although only on the level of personal salvation. Dagonet is able to hear the silent music of the star, the emblematic ideal, called "the harp of Arthur" (333). He, with Arthur and the band of angels, is part of the group of privileged who experience the fullness of vision (350). In Tristram's case his spiritual ears and eyes are blocked by the physical lusts of the flesh. It is Dagonet the humble fool who comprehends what Tristram the proud and foolish knight scorns. Dagonet and Arthur are, in Tristram's logic, fools. As Dagonet says, the King was overly ambitious in thinking that he could make delicious food out of that which is unappetising , beautiful clothing out of poor raw materials and men out of beasts (354-358). The essence of Dagonet's words is that for Arthur's spiritual vision to be translated into the world of men, it requires the correct raw materials. Arthur already suspects that he has failed when he wonders whether the realm reels back into the beast, soon to be no more (124-125).

Tristram is an ambivalent figure. He gives himself special licence which he does not allow anyone else. He advocates Mark's way, complete lawlessness, for which he has contempt. Tristram's ideas of freedom prove as fatal to him as Pelleas's hopeful visions prove for him. In spite of this even Tristram realises that Arthur's vows have their moment in the life of the Round Table. He says to Isolt:

> The vows!
> O ay - the wholesome madness of an hour -
> They served their use, their time; for every knight
> Believed himself a greater than himself,
> And every follower eyed him as a God;
> Till he, being lifted up beyond himself,
> Did mightier deeds than elsewise he had done,
> And so the realm was made; but then their vows -
> First mainly through the sullying of our Queen -
> Began to gall the knighthood, asking whence
> Had Arthur right to bind them to himself?
> Dropt down from heaven? washed up from out the deep?
> They failed to trace him through the flesh and blood
> Of our old kings: whence then? a doubtful lord
> To bind them by inviolable vows,
> Which flesh and blood perforce would violate.
> (669-684)

Tristram is a moral relativist. He challenges Arthur's vows on the grounds that they are not derived from the ruling passions of human nature. Moral vows must, for Tristram, conform to what he feels human nature is capable of. Tristram does, however, admit that the vows served their function in their time, lifting up every knight "beyond

himself". Appetites of the flesh get the better of his vows and rather than dismiss them altogether, Tristram attempts to usher in a new set of values which he believes to be more appropriate to the moral climate of Camelot. He champions a life of unprincipled liberty, self-indulgent and uncontrolled. When he hands the rubies, the symbols of Dead Innocence, to his tainted queen, Mark, the embodiment of his unprincipled existence, strikes him dead. "Mark's way" (748) he cries. If Tristram may violate his vows by stealth, then Mark may exterminate him in a similar fashion. Tristram has simply failed to realise the wider consequences of his moral relativism; the falsity of his position is clearly shown by the manner of his death.

The song Tristram sings for Dagonet is a feeble attempt at the carpe diem genre:

> Free love - free field - we love but while we may:
> The woods are hushed, their music is no more:
> The leaf is dead, the yearning past away:
> New leaf, new life - the days of frost are o'er:
> New life, new love, to suit the newer day:
> New loves are sweet as those that went before:
> Free love - free field - we love but while we may.
> (275-281)

Gray points out that the colon at the end of every line and the two sets of dashes at the first and last lines of the song suggest a limp spontaneity, a melancholy and spiritless performance (p.106). The hedonistic song pronounced by Tristram to "ring as true as tested gold" (284) is advocating a new set of values, to take love and pleasure when and where one may, with no thought of the spiritual, the only aim being to gratify the senses.

His moral relativism is his rationalisation which allows him to act as he wants to rather than as he should. As in Pelleas's case, when Tristram's ideals prove too difficult or fail completely, then the vows are at fault, not he who has trouble keeping them:

> Then Tristram, pacing moodily up and down,
> "Vows! did you keep the vow you made to Mark
> More than I mine? Lied, say ye? Nay, but learnt,
> The vow that binds itself too strictly snaps itself -
> My knighthood taught me this - ay, being snapt -
> We run more counter to the soul thereof
> Than had we never sworn. I swear no more."
> (649 -655)

Tristram's relativism is also hypocritical, taking stock of everyone's weakness except his own. He equates freedom with licence. He sees himself as a representative of the rational man, experienced

enough to make a fair, detached and analytical judgement about his actions and the actions of the others of the Round Table. To some extent Tristram voices the common doubt of the feasibility of holding Arthur's vows. Buckler (p.153) notes the false syllogisms he uses in his rationalisation: that he has broken his vows, but everyone else has as well; that his vows have snapped because he was bound too strictly; and that he is worse off after the swearing of the vows than he was before, because of the swearing in the first place. For Tristram everything centres on him: his day, his circumstances, his arguments. For him, unlike the fool, experience is not a "dirty nurse" but a great enlightener. Idealistic innocence is dead, which makes Tristram a moral relativist, a hedonist and a materialist. He is not, however, inconsistent with the morality he has chosen. He is not defined against anyone moral or idealistic in this idyll except the fool. Arthur is away and Lancelot is portrayed as at best impotent and at worst careless. The fool says to Tristram:

> Ay, and when the land
> Was freed, and the Queen false, ye set yourself
> To babble about him, all to show your wit -
> And whether he were King by courtesy,
> Or King by right - and so went harping down
> The black king's highway, got so far, and grew
> So witty that ye played at ducks and drakes
> With Arthur's vows on the great lake of fire.
> (339-345)

Even Queen Isolt knows that vows cannot change her lover. Because he has broken his vows once it is clear that he is prepared to do so again. Isolt declares that Tristram has lost that which makes a man more than a beast, the power of vows when man believes in his king (643-644). But Tristram has lost all courtesy and has become a beast. Isolt tells him:

> Far other was the Tristram, Arthur's knight!
> But thou, through ever harrying thy wild beasts -
> Save that to touch a harp, tilt with a lance
> Becomes thee well - art grown wild beast thyself.
> (629-632)

Isolt is also a relativist. It is by comparison with Mark that she finds Tristram more noble, not on account of anything that he himself has done to merit it. Should she judge Tristram on his own merits Isolt would be moved to hate more than love him: "O were I not my Mark's, by whom all men / Are noble, I should hate thee more than love" (594-5).

Even though Isolt realises Tristram is a dishonourable liar, she demands that he tell her what she wants to hear:

> Flatter me rather, seeing me so weak,
> Broken with Mark and hate and solitude,
> Thy marriage and mine own, that I should suck
> Lies like sweet wines: lie to me: I believe.
> (637-640)

Tristram is morally unprincipled but he is always plausible. He never alienates the reader who would then be in a position to disregard what he has to say. Isolt is, however, quite correct to say that Tristram has degenerated into a beast from a civilized man. His graceless treatment of the women spectators at the tournament of Dead Innocence, against all the rules of chivalry, is an example of the death of nobility in Arthur's brotherhood. Lancelot's lacklustre adjudication of the tournament is another instance. On the way to visit Isolt, Tristram's realisation of the magnitude of his moral weakness is dulled by the signs of various animals in the woods:

> Before him fled the face of Queen Isolt
> With ruby-circled neck, but evermore
> Past, as a rustle or twitter in the wood
> Made dull his inner, keen his outer eye
> For all that walked, or crept, or perched, or flew.
> (363-367)

Tristram's lack of objective morality undermines what passes for his value system. He is unable to decide which woman he loves, yet he knows that he loves the name Isolt.

Tristram tells Mark's queen that he loves the other Isolt only because of her name:

> Did I love her? the name at least I loved.
> Isolt? - I fought his battles, for Isolt!
> The night was dark; the true star set. Isolt!
> The name was ruler of the dark - Isolt?
> (598-601)

This lyrical apostrophe in praise of the name Isolt, showing Tristram as artist, is cruelly undercut in the next line when he ambiguously and callously dismisses his wife: "Care not for her! patient, and prayerful, meek, / Pale blooded, she will yield herself to God" (602-603).

The struggle of the two Isolts is not a simple struggle of passion with purity, red with white (Buckler,p.152). As if to accentuate the irony of the situation, when Mark's Isolt hears Tristram in the castle, she runs to meet him, belting "his body with her white

embrace" (511). Both Isolts are combatants in Tristram's disturbed mind in which the spirit of innocence is lost or killed. Nothing is known about Isolt of the white hands, she remains a pure and wronged figure. Isolt of Cornwall is more ambivalent. She seeks to escape from the reality of her beastly husband and is prepared to fantasise to do this. Tristram is merely a tool of her imaginative escape. She realises he is a dishonourable liar, but these are the very qualities which offer her the means of escape from the disastrous reality of her predicament; means that would not be available from an honest and honourable knight. If Isolt's passion is responsible for the relationship between her and Tristram, that passion is her hatred and fear of Mark and not her love of Tristram. For her the mention of Tristram's name becomes the invocation of the fiend who is Mark:

> And once or twice I spake thy name aloud.
> Then flashed a levin-brand; and near me stood,
> In fuming sulphur blue and green, a fiend -
> Mark's way to steal behind one in the dark -
> For there was Mark...
> (610-614)

For Tennyson, Arthur's entire mission is a dream: "the dream of man coming into practical life and ruined by one sin" (Ricks, p. 258). At this stage of the idyll cycle Arthur's kingdom cannot be redeemed, only the individual can. Tristram's dream (406-418) is a vision of the dreamer's true self. "The climactic scene between Tristram and Isolt demonstrates the impossibility now of permanent contracts" (Kincaid quoted in Buckler, p.288). The dream is also something insubstantial, either striven for or lost completely.

Tristram's dream (406) forebodes his own death and, like Lancelot's dream in Balin and Balan (255-263), it projects the anxieties and uncertainties underlying his ostensibly heroic and hard assurance, to show a mind pronouncing judgement upon itself. Tristram has won the trophy of innocence, but symbolically he learns from his dream that he has offended against the spirit of innocence. His dream is called the red dream (486) the lurid red in which we see the destruction of the Red Knight and his followers, where all the pavement "streamed with massacre" (476) and the tower is fired and burns "Red-pulsing up through Alioth and Alcor" (479). Dream and fact merge, one colouring the other in Tristram's unhappy and over-stressed mind. His dream is

the metaphoric expression of the mental struggle in which he engaged. He frees himself of his honour and his vows, but continues to believe that everybody else will live a moral life. He does not look behind him and see Mark who shouts "Mark's way" before cleaving him, significantly, through the skull; physically dividing an already divided brain.

Much of Tristram's narrated experience is of an elemental nature and is projected in elemental imagery. He represents a new and powerful wave of barbarity. He pretends to be without scruples or conscience, since he has declared himself loosed from what he considers the impossible vows, and seems to adopt Mark's moral system.

Tristram and the heathen wave are associated by the wave imagery. Both pose the same threat to Arthur's stability:

> The heathen - but that ever-climbing wave,
> Hurled back again so often in empty foam,
> Hath lain for years at rest - and renegades,
> Thieves, bandits, leavings of confusion, whom
> The wholesome realm is purged of otherwhere,
> Friends, through your manhood and your fealty, - now
> Make their last head like Satan in the North.
> (92-98)

When Tristram enters the lists in the tournament he elicits a wave-like response from the spectators; Lancelot hears "The voice that billowed round the barriers roar / An ocean sounding welcome to one knight" (167-8).

Later Pelleas, now the Red Knight, falls from his horse

> ... as the crest of some slow-arching wave,
> Heard in dead night along the table-shore,
> Drops flat, and after the great waters break
> Whitening for half a league, and thin themselves,
> Far over sands marbled with moon and cloud,
> From less and less to nothing; thus he fell...
> (461-466)

Tristram's song (725-732) uses contrasting and elemental images of water and fire, the star signifying the distant and controlled cold fire of the ideal. The water signifies the ruffled wave of barbarism that swamps and all but extinguishes the fire of the distant star which was Tristram's desire. In Pelleas's dream the morning star "Reeled in smoke, brake into flame, and fell" (PE 509), signifying the end of Camelot.

Dagonet uses images of fire, star and water when mentioning the lake of fire (345) and when he tells Tristram that he can both see and hear Arthur's star:

> I see it and hear.
> It makes a silent music up in heaven,
> And I, and Arthur and the angels hear,
> And then we skip.
> (348-351)

Dagonet transcends the boundaries of physicality to describe a spiritual vision in terms of sensation: something Tristram is unable to comprehend, much less achieve himself.

The fire imagery is used by Tennyson in ambivalent ways. In this poem fire is often destructive, as when the Red Knight's tower is set alight. In the Holy Grail the knights follow wandering fires in their quest. Tennyson uses more allusion, primarily biblical, in this idyll than any other. Gray (1980,p.55) notes each allusion in some detail, and to do the same would be to duplicate his work. More important, I think, is to note that Revelation is the text most used, which enhances the doom-laden atmosphere of the entire poem as well as making more significant the inevitable death of Tristram And Dagonet in his quasi-philosophical debate with Tristram makes mention of the burning lake of fire (345), a reference to Revelation, as is the Red Knight's curse when he "sware by the scorpion-worm that twists in hell,/ And stings itself to everlasting death" (450-451). Again Gray notes Revelation ix, 3: "as the scorpions of the earth have power", and Mark ix, 44: "Where their worm dieth not" (Ricks p.521).

Effective as the atmospheric allusions are, the real tragedy of the poem is not merely the death of Tristram but its implications, which affect all of Camelot. As Buckler notes, The Last Tournament

> ...is a revenge tragedy in which the individual rebels against the failure of recognized communal forms to render what he considers to be natural justice and thus exposes himself to the workings of the very violence that communal order was designed to protect him from.
> (p.143)

The destruction of "communal forms" is as disastrous for Camelot as it is for Tristram.

Guinevere

Guinevere was begun on the 9th of July 1857 and published in 1859. According to Emily Tennyson it took about two weeks to write (Ricks, p.529). It is the most original of the Idylls, although Malory Book xxi, chap.vii does tell us that Guinevere entered a monastery at Almesbury and lived a virtuous and changed life. In Malory, however, there is no meeting with Arthur before the final battle. Tennyson "follows Geoffrey of Monmouth in having Guinevere enter a nunnery before the final battle" (Gray quoted in Ricks, p.529).

Reed suggests that Guinevere "may be viewed as a central idyll in terms of the moral design" (p.69-70). Everything in the cycle leads towards Arthur's final meeting with Guinevere. Space is restricted to the confines of a single nun's cell and time is compressed so that the narrative events (excluding flashbacks) occur in almost the same time it takes to read through the poem. Tennyson uses flashbacks to add depth and poignancy to the scope of the poem, however, and for Buckler "the focus is never removed from the actual issue of Guinevere's self-recognition" (p.126). The atmospheric details are no danger to the integrity of the work as a simplified tragedy. Tennyson is never self-indulgent in his descriptions and mood settings. Throughout the idyll the land is shrouded by a creeping opaque mist even though the moon is full. Action is focused in the nun's cell. Everything that happens outside it appears unreal and ghostly. Arthur takes leave of Guinevere and she looks out of the window to catch the last glimpse of her husband and her king:

> And while he spake to these his helm was lowered,
> To which for crest the golden dragon clung
> Of Britain; so she did not see the face,
> Which then was as an angel's, but she saw,
> Wet with the mists and smitten by the lights,
> The Dragon of the great Pendragonship
> Blaze, making all the night a steam of fire.
> And even then he turned; and more and more
> The moony vapour rolling round the King,
> Who seemed the phantom of a Giant in it,
> Enwound him fold by fold, and made him gray
> And grayer, till himself became as mist
> Before her, moving ghostlike to his doom.
> (589-601)

Guinevere is one of the few characters in the cycle who achieve redemption by their own means. Although Arthur's realm is irrevocably

lost to the beast (personified by Modred and Vivien) the individual is still able to triumph. Guinevere embarks on a quest of personal salvation in a series of redemptive steps which begin with her recognition of the type and seriousness of her sin, and allow her to move beyond this to true repentance and finally to attain salvation.

Tennyson focuses on the psychological aspect of Guinevere's relationship with Arthur, and deals almost exclusively with the states of mind of both characters. This idyll is the climax of the war of sense and soul on an individual level, since by this stage in the cycle Arthur's realm is already irreversibly destroyed. The final meeting at Almesbury is the only time in the cycle when Arthur and Guinevere are able to relate as individuals and not as cogs of a greater social machine. Although notice is taken of their respective stations, both characters appear as themselves. Both have failed, Guinevere on a personal level and, as a consequence, Arthur on a social level. Both emerge as regal figures, Arthur appearing Christ-like.

The force of Guinevere is due to its simplicity: the stark walls of the convent, the simple black and white of the nun's clothing, the concentration of time and action which highlights what Buckler (p.133) calls the "dramatic climax" of the entire cycle. This idyll sees the final confrontation of spirit with flesh. Guinevere is led through various steps on her path to complete conversion. Even though the demise of Arthur's order is irrevocable, individuals are still able to maintain belief in it. In the case of Guinevere she achieves, albeit belatedly, understanding of Arthur's mission as king.

Guinevere's dream, like most of the dreams in the Idylls, is prophetic. In it she, like Pelleas, is the destroyer of all the civilised world. Her actions lead to unimaginable chaos, fire and madness. Her dream brings to climactic significance the dreams in the previous three idylls. As with Pelleas, this dream is the product of a mind in conflict with itself:

> ...if she slept, she dreamed
> An awful dream; for then she seemed to stand
> On some vast plain before a setting sun,
> And from the sun there swiftly made at her
> A ghastly something, and its shadow flew
> Before it, till it touched her, and she turned -
> When lo! her own, that broadening from her feet,

> And blackening, swallowed all the land, and in it
> Far cities burnt, and with a cry she woke.
> (74-82)

Like Ambrosius in The Holy Grail and Dagonet in The Last Tournament, the babbling novice in Guinevere is the articulated conscience, the voice of simplicity and truth. She is the inescapable means whereby Guinevere is forced to confront the truth of her position and the magnitude of her sin. The novice is not a fully rounded character herself, but her function for Tennyson is plain: to prod the proud Queen closer to the brink of self-realisation, enabling her finally to understand Arthur's vision.

Guinevere shows herself ready for salvation, from the time she tells Lancelot that they can no longer be lovers. Both she and Lancelot are, however, weak, for even though they have agreed not to meet, they continue to see each other. As Tennyson euphemistically says: "And still they met and met" (93).

Nevertheless, on occasion Guinevere shows the high nobility that qualifies her to be spoken of as a tragic heroine. When Lancelot offers her sanctuary - "...fly to my strong castle overseas: / There I will hide thee, till my life shall end" (112-113) - she replies, "Nay friend, for we have taken our farewells. / Would God that thou couldst hide me from myself" (116-117). Guinevere is, however, not so naive as to believe that she can function as an individual alone. She is a model, like Arthur and even Lancelot. She recognises both her individual responsibility and her mythic stature, even though she only understands the full meaning of the latter after Arthur's monologue.

When Guinevere arrives at Almesbury to ask for shelter, she is in the same position of anonymity that Gareth and Lancelot are in when they begin their respective quests for self-illumination: without name, fame or social advantage. Both Guinevere and Lancelot feel the additional social burden. Guinevere asks anonymity of the nuns, initially in an effort to protect herself.

> O peaceful sisterhood,
> Receive, and yield me sanctuary, nor ask
> Her name to whom ye yield it, till her time
> To tell you...
> (139-142)

Yet this anonymity ultimately proves ironic, since it enables the novice in her ignorance to confront Guinevere with the truth.

In spite of beginning her quest for self-realisation by withdrawing to Almesbury, Guinevere's pride does not allow her to be a completely redeemed person immediately. Hearing the rumour that Modred has usurped the throne while Arthur fights Lancelot, she thinks: "With what a hate the people and the King / Must hate me" (155-156). These are not inappropriate sentiments, yet they do show a marked egocentricity, characteristic of Guinevere from the beginning of the cycle. On one hand she recognises the enormity of both her individual and social sin, on the other hand she insists on putting herself at the centre of considerations.

The song "Late, so late", which the little novice sings at Guinevere's request, alludes to the famous parable in Matthew's Gospel (25:1-13) in which five foolish bridesmaids go to meet the bridegroom with their lamps but no oil, and so are unprepared to enter the wedding hall; but the five sensible bridesmaids take both lamps and oil and are allowed to enter. The song is a dramatic dialogue of a mind with itself, which both unveils Guinevere's predicament and offers her some stern insights regarding her position in Arthur's court (Buckler, p.129). The song is multi-levelled since the novice who sings it has remembered it but clearly does not understand or intend the irony of the damning lines. Guinevere hears the song which, of course, adds to the irony; and the reader expands on it from its allusion to the Gospel.

> Late, late, so late! and dark the night and chill!
> Late, late, so late! but we can enter still.
> Too late, too late! Ye cannot enter now.
> (166-168)

This is the last song sung in the Idylls, and in it Tennyson reverts to the simpler triad form of the earlier songs (although this may simply be because Guinevere was one of the earlier written idylls.) Gray argues (1980,p.107) that in spite of the lighter quicker form, this lyric is more tragic than the grave, melancholy autumn songs. The tone is one of impending doom which, as Gray says, is deepened by the contrast Tennyson makes with the fairy music, the music Camelot was once built to. The novice tells Guinevere of her

father's first impressions of Arthur's country and the strange music he heard:

> 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.
> (241-247)

Part of the intense sadness this exquisite lyric communicates is due to the emphasised negatives and the word "late" which is repeated fifteen times in twelve lines. The lateness is, of course, on many levels: individual, social, and at the end of Tennyson's mythic cycle.

The foolish virgins in this song are being excluded. In Gareth and Lynette, Gareth has to enter Arthur's realm of the imagination, also with fairy associations, and pass through the magical gates of Camelot. Guinevere is here, however, denied access to Arthur's kingdom. For re-entry into Camelot it is too late. Not only is the land split asunder by internal wars, but the communal support necessary for the maintenance of the spiritual ideal can no longer be found in the realm. For that, Guinevere must look closer to home: to the selfless community of Almesbury.

The novice here, Ambrosius in The Holy Grail and Dagonet in The Last Tournament are voices of truth. (Dagonet is, however, a far more complex and intentionally ironic figure.) The novice's song and her dialogue with the Queen are naive but also honest and sincere, and what she says is incontrovertible. She is an agent of revelation, an externally articulated conscience preparing the way for the more profound understanding imparted by Arthur in his monologue. The novice asks the catechetical question "But pray you, which had noblest [manners], while you moved / Among them, Lancelot or our lord the King?" (323-324). This leads Guinevere to reassess herself in entirety; not only her personal responsibility but also the extent of the communal damage she has done. It is the realisation of her carnality that enables Guinevere to understand her cardinal sin: pride. Earlier the novice has told her:

> But weigh your sorrows with our lord the King's,
> And weighing find them less; for gone is he

To wage grim war against Sir Lancelot there,
Round that strong castle where he holds the Queen;
And Modred whom he left in charge of all,
The traitor - Ah sweet lady, the King's grief
For his own self and his own Queen, and realm,
Must needs be thrice as great as any of ours.
(189-196)

The novice removes Guinevere from the focus of attention and replaces her with Arthur, who must live through the knowledge that his vision is unquestionably and irrevocably destroyed.

The dialogue between the novice and Guinevere indicates the steps the Queen must still take along her path towards self-illumination and redemption. She first tells Guinevere that greatness can have no shelter, that secrets will come out:

But even were the griefs of little ones
As great as those of great ones, yet this grief
Is added to the griefs the great must bear,
That howsoever much they may desire
Silence, they cannot keep behind a cloud:
As even here they talk at Almesbury
About the good King and his wicked Queen,
And were I such a King with such a Queen,
Well might I wish to veil her wickedness,
But were I such a king, it could not be.
(201-210)

Thereafter the novice, unwittingly in her innocence, and the guilt-ridden Guinevere, play through a range of attacks and defences. Guinevere blames Modred for the collapse of the realm but the novice will not be moved and again lays the blame at Guinevere's door (217). The Queen then attempts to shelter behind the walls of Camelot's sophistication, pointing out that the novice is a simple and plain soul. For the novice, sophistication or simplicity makes little or no difference. The Queen is to blame for her traitorousness as a root cause for the vulnerability of Arthur and the division in the ranks of the Round Table.

The authority for the novice's arguments is not empirical but subjective. Her father was a knight of the Round Table himself, an honest man of simple and strong faith. The sequence in which his daughter describes his reported experience is crucial to Guinevere's understanding of the mythic potentialities of her role as Arthur's Queen. Individual redemption is always possible while life remains, but it is only in the context of the community that Tennyson can create his mythopoeia. It is thus appropriate that Guinevere withdraws to a small community. She has sinned socially and it is only

later when she finds the path to redemption that she is able to use the convent of Almesbury as a means of making reparation.

Guinevere's last-ditch defence is to ask why, before the destructive influence of the queen was felt, nobody could foresee the disaster of the future. To this the novice replies that there was a bard who sang that if Arthur could find a woman as great in her womanhood as he, Arthur, was in his manhood (297-298), then "The twain together well might change the world" (297-299). But even as the bard sang this

> He faltered, and his hand fell from the harp,
> And pale he turned, and reeled, and would have fallen,
> But that they stayed him up; nor would he tell
> His vision; but what doubt that he foresaw
> This evil work of Lancelot and the Queen?
> (301-305)

The climax of the debate is reached when the novice asks Guinevere: "But pray you, which had noblest [manners], while you moved / Among them, Lancelot or our lord the King?" (323-324). This is a catechetical question which Guinevere answers expediently. Both men are equally noble "For manners are not idle, but the fruit / Of loyal nature, and of noble mind" (333-334). To this the novice replies that if manners are an indication of spiritual reality, then Lancelot must be a thousand-fold less noble than the King. At this Guinevere finally drops her defensiveness and asks for pity and prayer, both for Lancelot and the queen. The novice is unwilling to allow the conversation to end, and again unwittingly makes an ironic and hurtful comparison of her present companion with the great and traitorous Queen Guinevere.

In the various steps towards redemption (recognition, repentance and salvation), Guinevere realises what the nature of her repentance should be:

> But help me, heaven, for surely I repent.
> For what is true repentance but in thought -
> Not even in inmost thought to think again
> The sins that made the past so pleasant to us:
> And I have sworn never to see him more,
> To see him more.
> (370-375)

In spite of her new-made resolution of repentance she still thinks longingly of the days when she first met Lancelot:

> And even in saying this,
> Her memory from old habit of the mind

Went slipping back upon the golden days...
(375-377)

(In contrast, when Guinevere sees the King for the first time, she thinks him "cold, / High, self-contained and passionless" (402-403)). While Tennyson has Guinevere remembering these thoughts of Lancelot, he dramatically juxtaposes with them the arrival of the King at Almesbury. Guinevere falls at Arthur's feet in an act of humility and contrition rather than of the self-denigration it might seem.

The 152 lines that make up Arthur's dramatic monologue within the idyll (a form common in this genre, and the dramatic potentialities of which Tennyson exploits to the full) form the most widely criticised passage in the entire cycle, and the single passage most responsible for its rejection by many of Tennyson's contemporaries and later critics. Arthur's monologue is complex. Although it is spoken in a voice "monotonous and hollow like a ghost's" (417), the tone moves through extreme emotions - deep disappointment, utter world-weariness and regret, a stately sadness, a divine despair - to the fullest and most sustained explanation of Arthur's spiritual vision in all the cycle. Thereafter Arthur talks about his all-encompassing love for Guinevere which is truly spiritual, forgiving, and allowing of hope and redemption. This meeting, in terms of the major theme of sense and soul at war, is the real climax of the poem, and not Arthur's inevitable confrontation with Modred in The Passing of Arthur.

Arthur visits Guinevere with his life's work crumbling around him: his two most important relationships have failed and his spiritual vision has floundered hopelessly so that it will never again, in his lifetime, be manifest in the world of men. His realm is threatened by Modred, the crouching beast who has decided to make his spring with the heathen wave that he has raised. Arthur is a complete man poised on the brink of imaginative and existential doom. For Buckler this "poem's integrity is complicit in the man's integrity" (p.133). All themes and motifs have led to this point, and the moral truth of the poem as a whole depends on how consistently Tennyson presents Arthur.

Arthur assigns blame to Guinevere for her part in the demise of his realm. He has no wish to have an heir by Guinevere since her children he sees as red ruin, sword, fire and the breaking of laws. Arthur mourns the loss of wife, friend and realm, but he promises that Guinevere will not be harmed and will be guarded. He goes on to say how, because of his love for her, he holds his life lightly and will, from then on, be dogged by the ghostly footsteps of his impure wife.

He explains that he does not come to urge her sins, but rather to forgive her with burning tears (539) and to tell her that he loves her, with a pure and spiritual love that he hopes may one day be returned. Arthur explains the nature of her sin to her and creates a spiritual bond that enables him to approach his doom having resolved these issues and allowing her to rise, an illuminated and hopeful woman. She is not left with the idea that she is exonerated, but is given courage to face her predicament honestly:

> The king
> Called me polluted: shall I kill myself?
> What help in that? I cannot kill my sin,
> If soul be soul; nor can I kill my shame;
> No, nor living can I live it down.
> The days will grow to weeks, the weeks to months,
> The months will add themselves and make the years,
> The years will roll into the centuries,
> And mine will ever be a name of scorn.
> I must not dwell on that defeat of fame.
> Let the world be; that is but of the world.
> (614-624)

Arthur shows himself to be a paragon with a full range of human emotions. He feels and expresses his grief, but he also expresses his forgiveness and allows Guinevere to rise from her humility forgiven and hopeful, a more complete human being and aware of the magnitude of her sin:

> Ah my God,
> What might I not have made of thy fair world,
> Had I but loved thy highest creature here?
> It was my duty to have loved the highest:
> It surely was my profit had I known:
> It would have been my pleasure had I seen.
> We needs must love the highest when we see it,
> Not Lancelot, nor another.
> (649-656)

Guinevere is called to be the highest of women as Arthur is the highest of men. This pinnacle she cannot reach, but blame cannot rest too heavily on her shoulders since her primary sin is not that she is an adulteress, but that she does not recognise and love the highest

when she sees it. Guinevere is made a queen by Arthur, and although this status brings with it extraordinary opportunities, it also threatens her by setting unattainable standards (in much the same way Tristram and many of the knights find Arthur's vows do).

Culler raises the interesting question of why Arthur feels the need to marry Guinevere to be fully realised in his work. He suggests that perhaps Tennyson sees man as the spiritual principle and woman as the Earth Mother, or, more convincingly, that Guinevere is the essential aesthetic self of the poet. Her nostalgia for the sensuous past parallels the poet's cherished but mistrusted delight in shapes and colours of material objects. In Tennyson's attempt to create a complete and convincing mythopoeia it is imperative for Arthur that the spiritual and the sensuous marry. Just as important is that with "sublime repression" (Dedication,18) the spiritual must dominate and guide the sensual, in each individual and in the state.

The most criticised character in the Idylls is Arthur himself. He is called a prig by many of Tennyson's contemporaries and several modern critics. Ward Hellstrom writes: "Arthur in a rather self-righteous tone of moral superiority which is at once priggish and quite human, makes Guinevere's culpability paramount" (quoted Culler p.164). Kincaid has much the same to say: "We are prone to blame the whole episode on sexual prudery. In any case it seems thematically narrow, generically and tonally inappropriate" (quoted Culler p.164).

Arthur might seem a prig if his meeting with Guinevere were "simply" a marriage-crisis and a man and wife exchange; but in the context of Tennyson's mythopoeia it must be read as far more profound and universal in its implications.

The other obvious rebuttal of these misguided arguments is Gray's; he suggests that

> the proper critical question to ask is whether Arthur's conduct at this point is consistent with his character and with the spirit of Tennyson's Arthurian world. There is not a single passage to suggest that Arthur's condemnation of Guinevere is out of character.
>
> (Gray p.133-134)

This also means that Arthur is not a prig. He always gives the impression of being credible as fully human. He is the animating force behind the action in every idyll, impressive in his regality.

Like Modred, the figure associated with evil and destruction, Arthur is the personification of good. Both are aloof. Arthur does not reveal himself, except in a few scattered speeches. Tennyson makes a point of keeping him remote from the rest of the characters. He is, as Gray points out, a triumph in sustained majesty of tone and style (p.136). Nor is he heartless. Early on in his speech Arthur confesses to having feelings of violence and revenge:

> The wrath which forced my thoughts on that fierce law,
> The doom of treason and the flaming death,
> (When first I learnt thee hidden here) is past.
> The pang - which while I weighed thy heart with one
> Too wholly true to dream untruth in thee,
> Made my tears burn - is also past - in part.
> (534-539)

These are not the words of a heartless prig any more than when he confesses his love to Guinevere:

> But how to take last leave of all I loved?
> O golden hair, with which I used to play
> Not knowing! O imperial-moulded form,
> And beauty such as never woman wore...
> (544-546)

Guinevere's prostration at the feet of Arthur may be the cause of problems for modern readers, but her response is consistent with her character as she has revealed herself throughout the cycle. She has withdrawn from temptations and the quest for her own personal redemption is begun. Her sin is pride. She says when Arthur has left her:

> Ah great and gentle lord,
> Who wast, as is the conscience of a saint
> Among his warring senses, to thy knights -
> To whom my false voluptuous pride, that took
> Full easily all impressions from below,
> Would not look up, or half despised the height
> To which I would not or I could not climb -
> I thought I could not breathe in that fine air
> The pure severity of perfect light...
> (633-641)

Guinevere's "voluptuous pride", her uncontrollable sexuality, is an easily accessible metonym for her refusal, or inability, to recognise her spiritual calling. In the war of sense and soul Guinevere is temporarily lost to the sensuous. She is called on to be a moral and spiritual exemplum but is at first unable to meet the call. Reed suggests that

> Guinevere's was no intellectual pride ... hers is a voluptuous pride that wilfully overlooked its principal duty and thereby doomed itself. Just as intellectual pride can harden the heart and shut out, through mere vanity, the hope that reasoning despair denies; so the voluptuous heart can shade itself

against pure light, while it inclines to the ruddier colours more idly appreciated and enjoyed.

(p.76)

Only after her final meeting with Arthur does she selflessly serve her community in "good deeds" and with "pure life" (687). She learns that to love Arthur is to labour for the good of this "fair world".

The Passing of Arthur

The Passing of Arthur was written and published in 1869, the title The Death of Arthur used in the trial edition of the same year (Ricks p.547). Lines 170 to 440 of The Passing are from Tennyson's Morte d'Arthur (1842), to which very few changes were made. The source of the idyll is Malory's Morte d'Arthur, Book xxi, chapters iv and v.

The Passing of Arthur is the closing frame of the cycle. There is no combat, theme or motif in this poem that has not been introduced in one or more of the preceding idylls. As in all the Idylls, Tennyson only uses descriptions of the natural environment and detailed atmospheric descriptions when some immediate contribution to mood is called for. The mist that descends on the battle-field is a mist that separates man from God. The significance of the ruined religious and moral life of the realm is clear in the mortally wounded Arthur's being carried to a chapel with "A broken chancel with a broken cross,/ That stood on a dark strait of barren land", the ocean on one side and the great water of the mere on the other (177-180). The dying Arthur, the broken chancel and the broken cross are correlatives of the breakdown of all aspects of Arthur's vision: temporal, moral and spiritual.

When Arthur has killed Modred he asks Bedivere to carry him to the shore of the lake, out of the barren, inhospitable and bleak landscape: "My end draws nigh; 'tis time that I were gone" (331) and "Quick, quick! / I fear it is too late, and I shall die" (347-348).

Arthur, all that is most high and noble in mankind, is tempted to despair and give up hope, but Christlike he performs his final kingly act and regally sails into the rising sun. In The Coming of Arthur there is a range of various responses to Arthur's mysterious ap-

pearance. In The Passing of Arthur there is only Bedivere, the chosen and official reporter of the king's passing.

Bedivere's story is distanced by time and profoundly coloured by his own sense of failure. He is the "First made and latest left of all the knights" (4), and he speaks "In the white winter of his age" (3) to those unacquainted with Arthur or the Round Table: "new faces, other minds" (5). His narrative is told in a suspended impersonal voice, the voice of timeless literary tradition. Whatever is to be rescued from the glorious Round Table it falls to Bedivere to narrate. He is the symbolic surrogate and imaginative conscience through which our Arthurian impressions are filtered. At the heart of his narrative is his all-pervasive sense of failure and the temptation, both his and Arthur's, to succumb to utter despair. Bedivere eventually learns to see beyond his own predicament to the comfort he must give his king. He is the only knight who must live in the post-Arthurian era and it is only in his memory and imagination that Arthur's kingdom can have any continuity. The sense of failure is of such vital importance to Bedivere that he asks Arthur in heart-rending desperation just before the latter sails away:

> 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
> When every morning brought a noble chance,
> And every chance brought out a noble knight.
> Such times have not been since the light that led
> The holy Elders with the gift of myrrh.
> But 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.
> (395-406)

The narrative is not presented as an objective account of the final despairing struggles of the failed king and his passing to the healing isle of Avilion. It has as much to do with Bedivere as custodian of the myth as it has to do with Arthur. He is made prominent by being the sole source of the narrative and survivor of the grim battle. We are aware that his story comes from the centre of the action. He also, however, relates himself as "not himself", using the third person to present a double consciousness which Tennyson also achieves by having Bedivere's perspectives framed within the idyll kind. Buckley points out the complex levels of Bedivere's narrative:

"Formally, then, what we have is a perceiver (Bedivere removed by time and age) perceiving a perceiver (Bedivere at the centre of the action)" (p.36). Bedivere becomes the representative of the imaginative consciousness, the teller of the story about himself and, with the benefit of hindsight, of how he was moved and affected by the action.

His story is an elemental one; it is the closing of a great myth and a repositioning of the action in the realm of the imagination. Bedivere freezes, transmits and makes traditional Arthur's ideals, becoming one of the links in Tennyson's chain of mythmaking. For this role he has the requisite imaginative apprehensiveness and awareness of his position at the centre of the miraculous happenings, although when he is unable to cast Excalibur aside, Bedivere doubts his ability to keep the Arthurian myth alive and wishes to have tangible proof of his story. He views with some suspicion Arthur's command to throw the sword into the lake:

> What record, or what relic of my lord
> Should be to aftertime, but empty breath
> And rumours of a doubt?
> (266-268)

In The Coming of Arthur the king is able to comfort his knights. In the beginning of the final poem Bedivere is cast in the role of comforter to the disconsolate Arthur who has failed as king, as husband and as friend, and it is up to Bedivere that Arthur does not fail as the imaginative figure at the centre of the Arthurian myth. In this poem the range of responses has been limited to one loyal, imaginative and understanding knight who has grown from the time when he, as Arthur's first-made knight, was able to give Leodogran an account of Arthur's coming. He now gives a simple and sensitive account of his passing. Bedivere is narrator and hero. His story is an account of his own education and of his imaginative but stern and supportive advice to Arthur who is smitten by existential doubts of such magnitude that even he, the sinless king, seems liable to be swamped by them. Arthur is in a state of what Buckler calls an "irreducible minimum of faith" (p.28). He moans from within his tent:

> I found Him in the shining of the stars,
> I marked Him in the flowering of His fields,
> But in His ways with men I find Him not.
> I waged His wars, and now I pass and die.

(9-14)

In his almost overwhelming doubt is the realisation that nature upholds God's law and is true to its maker, but man is traitorous and fails. It seems to Arthur that man is unfitted to take his place in the divine plan, and that natural law can have no application in a world in which it appears, for a brief moment, that God has no power over the affairs of intransigent man:

> O me! for why is all around us here
> As if some lesser God had made the world,
> But had not force to shape it as he would,
> Till the High God behold it from beyond,
> And enter it, and make it beautiful?
> (13-17)

At the centre of Arthur's existential crisis is man. He does not doubt God's existence, nor does he fear that he has placed his faith in a lesser God. He must, however, face the idea of divine injustice: that he, Arthur, the upholder of every civilized code of honour, every law of conscience and justice, eventually fails, and it is inevitable that the question of God's justice must arise. The terrifying conclusion of this train of thought is that the hand of God that made nature is incapable of, or unequal to, the successful making and sustaining of mankind. This would mean that God's omnipotence is unequal to his benevolence.

Although Arthur comes close to despair in his "O me!", yet when he mentions "the lesser God" he immediately goes on to refer to a God beyond who does have power capable of changing the unhappy and corrupted condition of the world. He immediately makes the transition from the one lesser god to the "High God" who will "behold", "enter", and make beautiful (16-17).

Nor does he doubt God's potency, but he is unsure about what to believe of mankind. His doubt is comparable with Christ's "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me" (Mark 15:34). Arthur prays "My God, thou hast forgotten me in my death" (27), but immediately recovers to say "Nay - God my Christ - I pass but shall not die" (28). His despair is kept at a distance that allows him to deal with it. Arthur finally allows doubt without loss of faith. For him, men have not the power to see things as they are, "But these eyes of men are dense and dim" (19) and lack perspicacity.

The acknowledgement of doubt and loss of faith, even for a few moments, is impressive in the humanity it gives Arthur. His uncertainties make him more human and consequently a more dramatic figure. In his speech to Bedivere at the lake's edge (395), his mortal myopia has been completely accepted, even if incompletely understood. He entrusts to Bedivere the survival of his kingdom in the mythic imagination. Bedivere becomes the custodian of all that remains of Camelot and the Round Table, the kingdom of the mind. Arthur realises that all mankind must yield to a power greater than itself. For Arthur, to pass is not to die because man, like nature, requires endless self-renewals to fulfil his potential.

Arthur's period of doubt is the lowest point of his existence, when he has no idea of his own identity or even of his function as king. In his doubt, he says:

> For I, being simple, thought to work His will,
> And have but stricken with the sword in vain;
> And all whereon I leaned in wife and friend
> Is traitor to my peace, and all my realm
> Reels back into the beast, and is no more.
> (22-26)

He not only bears his own personal lack of identity, but has to deal with the additional burden of his social responsibility as king and moral arbiter. Should the king falter at this point the cycle would be in ruins, but should he not doubt he would be inconsistent as a human character.

In his dream Gawain, who blows along the wandering wind, shrills "Hollow, hollow all delight! / Hail, King! tomorrow thou shalt pass away./ Farewell! there is an isle of rest for thee." (33-35). The refrain "Hollow, hollow all delight" is perhaps the closest The Passing of Arthur comes to having a song. It is at once appropriate, coming from the libidinous, hedonistic and unprincipled Gawain, and comforting to Arthur (with the benefit of Bedivere's advice). Arthur questions what his dream signifies. He recognises Gawain's voice, but he wants to know if "all that haunts the waste and wild" (48) will go with him when he passes. Arthur's fear of his failure following him after death becomes a recipe for an all-enveloping cosmic gloom which temporarily afflicts him.

It is the bold Sir Bedivere who puts the dream into context, assuaging the doubts of the existentially troubled king, giving comfort by attempting to explain the dream in purely naturalistic terms. He tells Arthur that fate cannot be challenged or changed, that the dream is of only elves and deceiving lights, and that Gawain was a character light in life and so he is in death. Bedivere directs Arthur away from his mournful and melancholy reverie to kingly action. He tells Arthur:

> Light was Gawain in life, and light in death
> Is Gawain, for the ghost is as the man;
> And care not thou for dreams from him, but rise -
> I hear the steps of Modred in the West...
> (56-59)

Bedivere's implication is clear ("for the ghost is as the man"): man's afterlife is as he makes it.

Arthur's dream shows, as do all the dreams in the cycle, the anguished imaginings of the fevered mind assailed by doubts and fears - this time, however, using both visual and auditory imagery with considerably more emphasis on the latter. Arthur hears Gawain's ghost shrilling "Hollow, hollow all delight!" (33), the sound fading away like wild birds "that change / Their season in the night and wail their way / From cloud to cloud" (38-40).

After the battle there is a primal silence "as by some one deathbed after wail / Of suffering" (118-119). The only sound is the wave rolling the passive hands of the dead and rolling "far along the gloomy shores / The voice of days of old and days to be" (134-135). This is a "great voice that shakes the world" (139). When Arthur looks about and sees the devastation and death caused by the battle, he doubts himself and his kingship, and only after seeing Modred and being aware of his final kingly mission is he aware of his function as king:

> King am I, whatsoever be their cry;
> And one last act of kinghood shalt thou see
> Yet, ere I pass.
> (162-164)

When ordered to throw Excalibur into the mere, Bedivere is betrayed by his eyes. He looks at the hilt and "jacinth-work of subtlest jewellery" (225), and gazed so long / That both his eyes were dazzled

as he stood" (226-227). The second time Bedivere's intentions are also betrayed by sight:

> But when he saw the wonder of the hilt,
> How curiously and strangely chased, he smote
> His palms together, and he cried aloud:
>
> "And if indeed I cast the brand away,
> Surely a precious thing, one worthy note,
> Should thus be lost for ever from the earth,
> Which might have pleased the eyes of many men."
> (253-259)

On his return, Arthur asks Bedivere what he has seen or heard, but Bedivere only mentions what he has <u>heard</u>: "I heard the water lapping on the crag, / And the long ripple washing in the reeds." (284-285). Arthur immediately knows that Bedivere is leaving something out and says:

> Thou wouldst betray me for the precious hilt;
> Either from lust of gold, or like a girl
> Valuing the giddy pleasure of the eyes.
> (294-296)

Just as quickly as he detects his untruths, Arthur later sees by Bedivere's eyes that he has indeed cast Excalibur into the deep (317). Bedivere tells him that he was only able to throw away the brand by curtailing the sensory impressions and concentrating on the world of the spirit:

> Sir King, I closed mine eyelids, lest the gems
> Should blind my purpose, for I never saw,
> Nor shall see, here or elsewhere, till I die,
> Not though I live three lives of mortal men,
> So great a miracle as yonder hilt.
> (320-324)

Bedivere's spiritual motivation eventually defeats the senses and paradoxically makes them more fertile to a greater variety of impressions. After he has cast Excalibur into the lake he is able both to see and to hear. Both spiritually and sensuously he has become aware of the miracles occurring around him. He opens his eyes in time to see the samite-clad hand of the Lady of the Lake catch the hilt of the sword and brandish it. He also sees the "long glories of the winter moon" (360) reflected on the level lake. He sees the dusky barge (361) and hears the eerie cry of the three queens, the fitting end of Arthur's mythic life. Bedivere and Arthur watch the barge approaching the shore and hear

> A cry that shivered to the tingling stars,
> And, as it were one voice, an agony
> Of lamentation, like a wind that shrills

> All night in a waste land, where no one comes,
> Or hath come, since the making of the world.
> (367-371)

The primal cry of the three queens is both destructive and hopelessly sad as well as being positive; it is the cry of painful childbirth and the death cry of the passing age.

Arthur's barge disappears at the same time as the wailing dies away "from the great deep to the great deep" (445); this single line of song connects the first and last of the idylls (CA,410). Bedivere hears "the last echo born of a great cry" (459) and sees the speck, all that remains of the barge, "vanish into light" (468).

The Passing of Arthur presents the final confrontation of man with mortality, the inevitable and apocalyptic battle of sense and soul fought in a "deathwhite mist" (95) which blocks out the sun and even obscures the contending armies from each other. The theme of doubt, part of the moral design of the poem, is emphasised. The ultimate humbling of the flesh occurs in the "last dim battle in the west" where all is confusion and fear "For friend and foe were shadows in the mist,/ And friend slew friend not knowing whom he slew" (100-101), and some, seeking comfort, "looked up for heaven, and only saw the mist" (112).

Before slaying Modred, Arthur declares: "My house hath been my doom. / But call not thou this traitor of my house / Who hath but dwelt beneath one roof with me" (154-156). Whatever other weaknesses Arthur's house possesses, hate is not one of them. Far more than the many other sins (pride, covetousness, lust, anger, gluttony, envy and sloth), hate most destroys Arthur's kingship. The nadir of self-identity Arthur experiences as man and king is only resolved when he realises his final duty is to kill Modred.

Modred is pushed to the last limits of the land, the spongy mass that has risen from the sea, a peninsula surrounded by the "phantom circle of a moaning sea" (87), where the "pursuer could pursue no more" (89). Arthur pushes him to the furthermost reaches of the realm but his influence is so pernicious that he cannot allow him to remain alive.

Arthur's final speech (407-432) is the climax of the cycle on a personal and universal level. From first to last Arthur speaks and acts as king: "a man of infinite humanity and a model of courtesy, he is Tennyson's subtlest and most poetic character, the unifying figure of the whole poem" (Gray,1980, p.136). Tennyson was engaged in creating a mythology as well as creating a psychological study of various characters of the idylls. This dual brief is made possible and encouraged - as has been suggested in the introduction - by the idyll genre. Guinevere shows the climax on the level of the individual. The Coming of Arthur and The Passing of Arthur begin and complete the mythic cycle of the king's life. Tennyson, like Homer, "constructs a Homeric (Tennysonian) world in which mythical, historical and contemporaneous elements are fused into a poetical whole" (Gray, 1980, p.137).

Bedivere, in throwing away Excalibur, allows obedience to a spiritual leader to dominate over what seems to him common sense. In Arthur's final parting speech Bedivere is instructed in the mysteries, not only of Arthur, his vision and his failure, but in faith and the perennial human doubt of afterlife. Bedivere is party to Arthur's individual and kingly doubts as he faces death and the future. In his speech from the barge Arthur moves beyond a despondent and defeated man to assume his true status as a kingly hero. He becomes a symbol of hope, an imaginative presence in the mind of Bedivere, who is then in a position to continue the myth. Arthur tells him, "Comfort thyself: what comfort is in me?" (411). Only in Bedivere's memory, illuminated by imagination, do Arthur and his kingdom have any further reality. Bedivere has no sensory certitude at all. Even when he climbs to the highest point he can reach and looks after Arthur, Tennyson makes his sensory perceptions unreliable:

> Thereat once more he moved about, and clomb
> Even to the highest he could climb, and saw,
> Straining his eyes beneath an arch of hand,
> Or thought he saw, the speck that bare the King.
> (emphasis mine) (462-465)

Bedivere's uncertain seeing and hearing but enhanced imaginative apprehension allows the tentative but undoubtedly positive concluding lines of the poem to usher in a new cycle on a higher level of an

ever-new mythology. For each retelling of Tennyson's story through Bedivere there is a "new sun" which brings a "new year" (469).

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