

TENNYSON'S IDYLLS: A CRITICAL STUDY

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by

H. S. HOUGHTON-HAWKSLEY

Supervisor: Mr B. S. LEE

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NOTE ON REFERENCES TO THE TEXT OF THE 'IDYLLS OF THE KING'

Poetry citations are to line number unless otherwise specified. Citations from the Idylls of the King are given in parentheses immediately after the quotation and are abbreviated as follows:

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

PREFACE

This critical study of the Idylls of the King is an attempt to demonstrate that Tennyson's treatment of the Arthurian theme, while being a new but valid development of a particular literary tradition, also resulted in a poem of considerable literary merit.

Critical opinion of the poem has fluctuated considerably since the Idylls of the King was first published in 1859. Critics in the period from 1859 to the end of the 19th Century were almost invariably fulsome in their praise, the typical comments of Gladstone, Bagehot, Cheetham, Oliphant, Alford, Littledale, Maccallum and others ranging from Alford's '...a great connected poem, dealing with the very highest interests of man' to Gladstone's '...its author ...has made a sensible addition to the permanent wealth of mankind.'¹

Inevitably, reaction set in and, in the first three decades of the 20th Century most critics were damning in their disapproval of what Carlyle had termed Tennyson's 'superlative lollipops', Eliot further declaring that '...for narrative Tennyson had no gift at all.'² As early as 1916 Bradley stated that 'the nadir of his [Tennyson's] fame may not quite be reached, but it can hardly be far off.'³ Then in 1921 Boas commented that the Idylls was not 'an organic whole'⁴ and, in 1923, Fausset repeated this criticism, adding that

Tennyson's 'morality overwhelmingly depressed the plot'.⁵ Nicolson established a new trend in 1925 when he praised certain aspects of the poetry of the Idylls but then condemned the series as a whole: 'In spite of the magnificent poetry which the Idylls contain ...these poems of the Farringford period are for the most part intellectually insincere'.⁶ Much later, in 1963, Baum also lauds the 'brilliant passages' but then declares the total work to be '...utterly wanting in unity, and coherence of structure...and meaning'.⁷ But Priestley, in my opinion, brought some sense of balance to criticism of the Idylls with his article in the 'University of Toronto Quarterly' in 1949. There he gave his assessment of the Idylls of the King, stating that the 'real deficiency grows out of their piecemeal composition' but, nevertheless, stressing that 'the total dramatic effect seems...to have considerable power'. His assessment is at variance with Nicolson's charge of insincerity as he affirms that the Idylls 'represent one of Tennyson's most earnest and important efforts to deal with major problems of his time',⁸ and, in 1960, concludes that the poem 'is surely the finest symbol of what Tennyson himself built, his poetic city'.⁹ Other modern critics: Engbretsen, Buckley, Wilson, Ryals, Gray, Rosenberg and others, are unanimous in their assessment of the Idylls as a work of high literary value.¹⁰ This tendency in literary criticism of the Idylls caused Palmer to observe that 'no work of Tennyson's has been so strikingly revalued during recent years as the Idylls'.¹¹

Although the corpus of Tennysonian criticism is a large one, no unified critical study has previously been made - to my knowledge - of the Idylls of the King both as an original interpretation of the Arthurian legend and as a work of art, paying particular attention to its imagery, structure and theme. The time seems to me to be appropriate for re-assessing the Idylls now that the pendulum of critical opinion has swung to both extremes since the poet's death.

In order to place the Idylls in their historical perspective I have, in the Introduction, given a résumé of Arthurian literary tradition up to the time of Malory, paying particular attention to the works referred to as sources (by either Tennyson himself or by Hallam Tennyson), and/or to those which had clearly influenced Malory. As Tennyson's acknowledged main source, the Morte Darthur is the well-defined overlap between the legend and the Idylls of the King.

Chapter One first traces Tennyson's great debt to Malory and, paradoxically, his lack of dependence on him. Such comparison has generally been neglected by critics who, in the main, are satisfied to quote the relevant chapter from Malory as his source, but seldom compare the divergent aims of the two authors before assessing the literary worth of the parallel extracts. In this regard C.S.Lewis says that 'the first qualification for judging any piece of workmanship from a corkscrew to a cathedral is to know what it is -- what it is intended to do and how it is meant to be used'.¹² While not attempting to anticipate the fuller critical analysis of the poem which follows in the remaining chapters of the thesis,

this chapter demonstrates that Tennyson's purposes in composing the Idylls were very different to Malory's (in writing the Morte Darthur). In the second place, this chapter compares the Geraint idylls with the Mabinogion story of 'Geraint Son of Erbin' in order to show what use Tennyson made of this source. Then, finally, the evolution of Tennyson's purposes prior to the composition of the 1859 Idylls will be shown through a discussion of his Arthurian poems which are not incorporated in the Idylls, and of the unpublished prose drafts of Arthurian themes. Some of these prose drafts are of Arthurian projects not followed up by the poet, others are drafts for individual idylls which form part of the Idylls of the King.

Then follows a detailed study of the Imagery, Structure and Theme(s) of the Idylls. In Chapter Two particular attention is paid to Tennyson's use of cyclic imagery, particularly as it relates to the seasons, colour, animals, music, names and water. The cyclicity of treatment of imagery progresses naturally to the cyclicity of structural design which is discussed in Chapter Three. I have concentrated on cyclic imagery for two reasons. The first is that critics of the Idylls have, almost without exception, praised Tennyson's technical mastery of language symbolism, i.e. imagery, thus making further general discussion relatively superfluous. Secondly, it is only in the last two decades that the some scholars, e.g. Buckley, Engelberg, Rosenberg and Gray, have appreciated the contribution made by what may be termed cyclical or serial imagery,¹³ and it is my contention that it is the cohesive cyclical unity of imagery, structure and

theme which must form the framework for a valid re-assessment of the Idylls of the King.

Chapter Three considers first the chronological development of the poem in order to point out why Tennyson ultimately recast the series in a non-chronological arrangement. I put forward a theory in connection with the cyclical ordering of matching pairs of individual idylls which I think affords definitive evidence of the deep structural design of the poem. This theory treats pairs of idylls which display a similar structural design and have the same or almost the same date of composition. The date of each idyll is of great importance as it is my contention that Tennyson, from 1859, had an overall design for his Arthurian poem in his mind and that his final poem in 1885 was no mere réchauffé of individual poems but a unified major work with a relevance encompassing at least his own age and ours. I have analysed the structure of each of the idylls in each 'pair' in order to demonstrate that an empirical investigation of the structure and tone of the idylls corroborates my theory.

A discussion of theme comprises Chapter Four of the thesis. As the question of relevance is of particular importance in a work characterized as the Idylls is by what Tennyson termed 'parabolic drift', the applicability of the major themes to the life of man is a consideration of paramount importance. In this chapter I trace the most important themes of the Idylls of the King and discuss their inter-relationship with imagery and structure.

The Conclusion is devoted to drawing together the threads of what was necessarily a discrete analysis of Tennyson's use of sources, and of the imagery, structure and theme of the poem, prior to stating my assessment of the literary worth of the Idylls of the King. It is the underlying contention of this thesis that, although one must concede certain minor inconsistencies and imperfections in the Idylls, the poem displays a remarkable unity of imagery, structure and theme. Consequently it ought to be considered, not only as one of Tennyson's most important poems, but also as a work which certainly deserves to be included with Malory's Morte Darthur in the main stream of Arthurian literary tradition.

INTRODUCTIONTHE ARTHURIAN LEGEND

'...a painted battle...' (CA 121)

In his annotated edition of the Idylls of the King, Hallam Tennyson surveys the sources consulted by his father when composing the separate idylls. He states that

On Malory, on Lazamon's Brut, on Lady Charlotte Guest's translation of the Mabinogion, on the Old Chronicles, on old French Romances, on Celtic folk-lore, and largely on his own imagination, my father founded his epic...my father had also read Erec and Enid by Chrestien de Troyes, ...he read, in the original Hanes Cymru (Welsh history), the Mabinogion, and Llywarch Hen.¹

Tennyson was in possession of at least one of the three editions of Malory's Morte Darthur published between 1816 and 1821 and consulted Lady Charlotte Guest's translation of the Mabinogion which was published in 1838. Also available to him was Sir Frederick Madden's three-volume edition of Lazamon's Brut, published in 1847. Chrestien de Troyes' Erec et Enide was certainly available in the original French but it is doubtful whether Tennyson made much reference to it. Hallam's note regarding Hanes Cymru (Welsh history) does not imply that Tennyson made a detailed study of this material, and the poems associated with the name Llywarch Hen are merely fragments dealing with Arthur, Geraint, Tristram and others, and are found in The Black Book of Carmarthen.

It is not the purpose of this thesis to consider the validity of Hallam's statement. In Chapter One I shall analyse

Tennyson's use of the Morte Darthur, his major source for ten of the idylls. The two Geraint idylls were based on Lady Charlotte Guest's translation of the Mabinogion. It is important to take note of the growth of the Arthurian tradition which led up to Malory's Morte Darthur, as it is partly against the perspective afforded by this background that the value of Tennyson's contribution to the Arthurian literary tradition will be assessed. When he commenced his Arthurian poems in 1830 with 'Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere' which was partly written in that year, there was little relevant scholarship to aid him in his research. In fact, W.D.Paden remarks in this regard:

...the *matière de Bretagne* was not then considered to have much literary importance except in an antiquarian sense; the romances were regarded as confused refractions of a puzzling semi-historical phenomenon. Except Le Morte Arthur and the Historia Regum Britanniae the available Arthurian material consisted very largely of argumentative footnotes to histories of England, and of cursory summaries of unpublished manuscripts.²

Apart from Malory's Morte Darthur and Spenser's The Faerie Queene, no recognized major English work after the stanzaic Morte Arthur (c. A.D.1400) dealt with King Arthur and his knights. Scott and Southey touched upon the theme early in the 19th Century, and Bulwer Lytton composed an unsuccessful Arthurian epic, while, in the 1850s, Matthew Arnold's 'Tristram and Iseult' and William Morris' 'Defence of Guinevere' were published, but these could have had only a limited influence upon Tennyson whose interest in the Arthurian legend derived from Malory and earlier works.

The Growth of Arthurian Legend:

Although the De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae of Gildas, written about A.D.540, does not mention Arthur, it records the battle of Badon Hill which is one of the twelve great victories ascribed to Arthur by Nennius in the Historia Britonum, a composite work of the early part of the ninth century. The thirty or more manuscripts attributed to Nennius are the beginnings of the recorded history of King Arthur and would have formed the basis for research when the Arthurian theme was taken up with new enthusiasm in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Loomis has demonstrated the existence among the Welsh of a flourishing body of tradition, both oral and written, of which Arthur became the central figure by 1100 at latest.³ Many of these Welsh stories are derived from the Historia Britonum. One such legend is that there was a stone at Carn Cabal bearing the footprints of Arthur's hound, Cabal, while he hunted the boar, Troit. This incident, taken from Nennius, appears in Kulhwch and Olwen (c.1080-1100) which is itself part of the Mabinogion, a twelfth century and later collection of Welsh romances. Prior to this the Annales Cambriae (c.960) noted the final battle between Arthur and Modred.

The Mabinogion (c.1080-1425) is a collection of twelve ancient Welsh tales, eleven of which are contained in the Red Book of Hergest, the manuscript of which is at Jesus College, Oxford. The twelfth, Taliessin, is largely in verse. Only five, viz. Kulhwch and Olwen, The Dream of Rhonabwy, The Lady of the Fountain, Peredur, and Geraint Son of Erbin, are romances more or less closely associated with the Arthurian cycle.

The last three correspond respectively to Chevalier au Lion, Perceval, and Erec of Chretien de Troyes. Although there is controversy on the subject, it seems probable that the Welsh legends are original and were redacted by Chretien or his sources. Tennyson possibly read the story of Geraint in Chretien's Erec, but it is accepted that the main source for the Geraint idylls was Lady Charlotte Guest's 1838 translation of the Mabinogion. It is arguable, however, whether Tennyson, in following the Mabinogion relatively closely, 'pared the story of its almost epic fullness of detail and focused more intently upon the characters of the protagonists'⁴ as Eggers asserts. Tennyson has preserved most of the descriptive passages of the original but has converted the two-dimensional Welsh original into an intricately designed, symbolic poem. Thus, for example, there is little depth in the way the Welsh author concludes:

And Geraint went towards his own dominions, and thenceforth he reigned proudly and his warlike fame and splendour lasted with glory⁵ and honour both to him and to Enid from that time forth.

Here Geraint is merely a warlike chieftain, and there is no indication of any thematic importance deriving from his unjust accusation of Enid.

Tennyson, however, in the last lines of 'Geraint and Enid' reinforces the theme of the true and the false, contriving by the single word 'more' in '...nor did he doubt her more' (GE 965), to think back to the culpable manner in which he had doubted her and had, in his pride, humiliated her. The fact that Geraint 'rested in her fæalty' (GE 966) is ironic as her fæalty had not changed but his had.

The Mabinogion has great importance as the source of Tennyson's Geraint idylls but it is of lesser importance in the overall line of Arthurian literary tradition. More prominent was the pseudo-historical Historia Regum Britanniae (c.1136) of Geoffrey of Monmouth. This stimulated a great upsurge of interest in the 'historical' Arthur and exerted considerable influence on medieval writers of Arthurian romance. By recording as historical various stories concerning Arthur's parentage, his battle with Modred, and his death and translation to Avalon, Geoffrey successfully united scattered legends about Arthur in so convincing a manner that he both won the favour of his readers and established his work as authoritative. As Finlayson notes:

It is he who establishes the conception of Arthur as a great medieval monarch and an ideal of chivalry, a man who was a great world conqueror fit to rival Alexander and also the hub of a civilization⁶ which nurtured values other than those of mere strength.

In spite of his initial statement that he intended writing 'a history of the Kings of Britain' based on 'a certain most ancient book in the British language that did set forth the doings of them all in due succession and order',⁷ Geoffrey treated the whole Nennian account of Arthur as the beginning of a biographical romance. This was, according to Barber, possibly his greatest achievement:

He produced an historical romance which, whether he intended it or not, was lifelike enough to be taken by his successors as history for some six hundred years after his death.⁸

Although he blended magic and 'fact' in his Historia - which nowadays has literary rather than historical value - his tone throughout is that of 'one who is simply recording established facts'.⁹

Consequently, most historians and chroniclers of his time accepted his accounts of Arthur and Merlin and of Arthur's expected return from Avalon. It also formed the basis of much of the related work by verse chroniclers, notably Gaimar and Wace.

Gaimar's rhymed translation of the Historia (c.1150) was soon superseded by Wace's Roman de Brut, a metrical chronicle which may be said to occupy an intermediate position between the prose chronicle and the metrical romance.¹⁰ Although the Brut is a metrical reproduction of the Historia to a large extent, it is a creative translation as Wace, while aiming at sincerity and truth, 'embellishes his narrative with countless imaginative details'(pp.vii-viii). One of these is his invention of the Round Table, a leitmotif which was to become central to Arthurian storytelling. Typical of his creative treatment of his subject is the following description of Mordred's treachery and subsequent defeat:

Mordred learned of Arthur's purpose. He cared not though he came, for peace was not in his heart. ...Mordred and his men had fared richly and lain softly overlong. They were sickly with peace. ...Arthur and his own ravened among them, smiting and slaying with the sword (pp.110-11).

Wace's comments: 'for peace was not in his heart' and 'They were sickly with peace', are creative commentary not found in the Historia and juxtapose these two concepts of 'peace' very effectively. Presumably Rhys, in translating, kept closely to the original French, and the powerful 'ravened' underscores the absolute terror and ruthlessness of Mordred's and Arthur's men respectively. This 'unusual power of visualising' (p.x) is the forerunner of Tennyson's poetic style. It enabled Wace

to bring to Geoffrey's story the chivalric material that it lacked. Perhaps the greatest debt which literary tradition owes to Wace, however, is that his Roman de Brut was the direct source for one of the major Arthurian works of the early 13th century, viz. the Middle English alliterative chronicle of Lazamon, the Brut.

Lazamon's Brut marks the first appearance of Arthur in English. Although it is a translation of Wace's Roman de Brut, Barber remarks that 'the influence of chivalry is entirely lacking' and Arthur, while lamenting his own fallen knights with great tenderness, 'is ferocious towards his enemies in a way that seems distinctly unappealing today' (pp.50-1). Rhys' translation reads: 'he commanded all his thanes and his noble knights, together to take the fight and fell his enemies, and the burgh all to destroy, and hang the burgh-folk' (p.262). Lazamon's Arthur is not the knight-errant of Wace, but a ferocious warrior whose deeds are the focal point of the story. His Brut contains many additions to the Arthurian legend, and his Celtic version of Arthur's departure from earth is both more explicit and, paradoxically, more related to the world of faery than Wace's account of the 'Breton hope' of Arthur's messianic return (pp.114 and 264).

For all their differences, Geoffrey, Wace and Lazamon treat Arthur's story in chronicle fashion, and the last important work in this 'historical' chronicle tradition is the Morte Arthure, an alliterative medieval epic poem, the authorship of which remains unknown, but which was probably written about 1360.

Most of the Arthurian narratives in the English literature of the fourteenth century, with the exception of the Morte Arthure, were based on French romantic sources. In them, as in these French romances, the hero observed a code of behaviour which was the product of literary convention, and was not generally current in society. The romances most relevant to this study are those of Chretien de Troyes, the Vulgate Romances, and the stanzaic Morte Arthur.

Chretien's Erec et Enide (c.1170) was one of the first romances in the mainstream of strictly Arthurian literature, and in Barber's words it set 'certain patterns which were to endure throughout medieval Arthurian romance' (p.69). These include the achieving of quests, the testing of knightly prowess, and the conflict of appearance and reality. The metrical romances describe the lives of the knights of the Round Table, or isolated episodes in their careers. As MacCallum states: 'In them Arthur himself achieves little, the wars with the Saxons disappear, and the final catastrophe is unknown'.¹¹ So, for example, Erec's pursuit of Yder, son of Nut, is a quest which tests his knightly prowess, and his lofty tone in speaking to his discredited opponent is typical of the 'mesure' or 'courtoisie' expected of the romance hero:

Vassal, I am he who was in the forest yesterday with Queen Guinevere, when thou didst allow thy ill-bred dwarf to strike my lady's damsel. It is disgraceful to strike a woman. And afterwards he struck me, taking me for some common fellow. Thou was guilty of too great insolence when thou sawest such an outrage and didst complacently permit such a monster of a lout to strike the damsel and myself. For such a crime I may well hate thee; for thou hast committed a grave offence.¹²

Although Chretien did not initiate metrical romance, he transformed what was a new genre by allowing the paganism of old myths to be cloaked with a Christian spirituality. He also 'first gave prestige to the Matter of Britain as it was fecundated by the French genius',¹³ thereby leading to the Vulgate Romances, described by Jean Frappier as follows:

The most widely read and the most influential group of Arthurian prose romances is called by modern scholars the Vulgate cycle. ... This cycle consists of five romances: (1) the Estoire del Saint Graal; (2) a prose version of Robert's Merlin, with a lengthy sequel; (3) the Lancelot. (4) the Queste del Saint Graal; (5) the Mort Artu ... Dated probably between 1215 and 1230 it belongs to the period when Arthurian romance, still profiting from the impulse given by Chretien, was taking new directions.¹⁴

In this cycle there is little balance between the various adventures related and the underlying themes of the discrete romances. There is no central plot, consecutive sequence or narrative unity, except inasmuch as the cycle has the Quest of the Grail at its centre, and much of the work is steeped in the religious doctrines of the Cistercian monks. There is, as Vinaver points out, a deep antagonism between the Grail Quest and the whole epic of the Round Table with its profane ideals of courtly love.¹⁵ Nevertheless, this prose Vulgate cycle is of the greatest importance in the Arthurian literary tradition as it, together with the alliterative Morte Arthure and the stanzaic Morte Arthur, represents the wellspring of information which Malory was to incorporate in his Morte Darthur. Almost all of the new material to be found in this cycle relates to the emergence of Lancelot as the most important secular Arthurian hero in the place of Gawain. On the other hand, Arthur with his Round Table, which has the proclaimed purpose of leading to virtue in a disrupted society, is the most

important central figure even though his function is very limited in much of the story with the exception of the initial and final sections. Two artistic techniques in particular, viz. *èntrelacement* and dramatic irony, are developed in these prose romances. (Malory, to a large extent, succeeded in limiting the intricacies of the *èntrelacement* technique while maintaining a multiplicity of discrete episodes in his Morte Darthur. Tennyson, on the other hand, while not employing medieval interlacing techniques, combined structural complexity with a relatively small number of narrative episodes, mainly by his use of cyclical imagery.) In the way that the Quest of the Grail is accorded a high moral significance, the Mort Artu is made to represent 'the decay of a Court whose spiritual values are absent. ...The chain of causes seems endless and inevitable; only the spiritual way offers an escape from the toils of the flesh, and this is no longer open.'¹⁶

There is a pronounced allegorical aspect to the various characters, especially Arthur, Lancelot, Gawain, and the three Grail knights, viz. Galahad, Perceval and Bors. But perhaps the greatest achievement of the writers of the Vulgate romances was their humanizing of these figures within their allegorical or symbolic role, in particular with regard to the love of Lancelot and Guinevere. This new insistence on moral significance and the allegorical role of the characters is pursued even further in the Morte Darthur. Vinaver has shown that Malory's Morte Darthur was drawn mainly from French source material,¹⁷ as Caxton wrote in his Preface. Current scholarship endorses this view. But to the sources mentioned by

Frappier Vinaver adds the French prose Tristam as the pertinent source for Books VIII to XII of Malory. He is firm on Malory's debt to the Vulgate cycle, stating:

Malory's 'Frensse Booke' was in all probability a single French MS divided into three or four volumes. ...No less than eight extant French Manuscripts combine the Merlin, the Lancelot proper, the Queste, and the Mort Artu. ... MSS. Bibl. Nat. fr. 112, 116, and 758 connects these romances with the Tristan. 18

The last important work in the romance mainstream is the stanzaic Morte Arthur, composed about 1400. This poem derives mainly from the French Mort Artu. It does not evidence the rich imagery of the alliterative Morte Arthure, but is marked by a straightforward narrative style. Stanza 435 is quoted to illustrate this point:

'What saw thow there?' than sayd the kynge,
 'Telle me now, yif thow can.'
 'Sertes, syr,' he sayd, 'nothyng
 But watres depe And waves wann.'
 'A! now thow haste broke my byddyng!
 Why haste thow do so, thow false man?
 A-nother bode thow muste me bryng.'
 Thanne careffully the knyght forthe ranne.¹⁹

The development from the stanzaic Morte Arthur, through Malory, to Tennyson is clear and it is interesting to note that both the latter writers place the emphasis on the positive values of knighthood and courtesy, an aspect which is ignored in the stanzaic poem. Malory's Arthur declares that it 'is untruly said of thee' and commands Bedivere to 'do my command as thou art to me lief and dear.'²⁰ Tennyson's Arthur is even more explicit:

Thou hast betrayed thy nature and thy name,
 Not rendering true answer, as beseemed
 Thy fæalty, nor like a noble knight:
 ... quickly go again,
 As thou art lief and dear, and do the thing
 I bade thee (PA 241-9),

Most of Malory's Book XX and Book XXI, and even the Maid of Astolat episode from Book XVIII, evidence many similarities with the stanzaic Morte Arthur, leading Frappier to declare:

Malory followed him [the author of the Morte Arthur] closely in his narrative of the last battle, the passing of Arthur, and Launcelot's last interview with Guinevere. 21

A short comparison between the two works will illustrate this point. When, prior to the last battle, Arthur and Modred met in order to work out a truce, an adder bit one of Arthur's knights who drew his sword and killed it. This movement was misinterpreted as the sign for the battle to begin! There are many notable similarities in the accounts given of this incident. The stanzaic poet says: 'As they A-cordyd shulde have bene' (l.3340), and Malory relates: 'they were agreed and accorded thoroughly' (XXI iv). The stanzaic knight wanted 'to kylle the Adder had he thoghte' (l.3345), and Malory's knight 'drew his sword to slay the adder, and thought of none other harm' (XXI v).

From this account of the growth of the Arthurian legend it appears that its two main branches, which may be called chanson de geste and romance, are not discrete lines of development but interweaving lines with many points of contact. As Finlayson writes, the values of the chanson de geste are expressed primarily through battle, whereas the ideal to which the romance hero aspires is that of 'courtoisie' which operates equally through the refinement of the laws of combat, social intercourse and the service of women. In furthering the Arthurian tradition Malory welded these two genres into a new one in which he kept the chronicle character of the chanson de

geste while maintaining definite links with the essence of romance which 'creates a code and expresses values not generally current in society'.²²

As Malory's Morte Darthur is Tennyson's main source for the Idylls of the King, it is important to note the position of the Morte Darthur in the literary development of the Arthurian story. Vinaver declares that Malory's work 'is a slightly modified and condensed translation of the French Arthurian novels',²³ and then compares it with the French prose cycle. Benson concurs, saying that 'the Vulgate is the cycle that Malory knew in its most nearly complete form'.²⁴ Brewer adds that 'Malory translated Morte Arthure' and used 'a French source, and another English poem, the stanzaic Morte Arthur'.²⁵ Malory's main sources were, then, the French Vulgate cycle, and the English Morte Arthure and Morte Arthur.

Such, then, was the wealth of folklore and legend that Tennyson had at his disposal. Closest to hand were the early 19th Century editions of Malory's Morte Darthur and the 1838 translation of the Mabinogion by Lady Charlotte Guest. These two works undoubtedly stimulated Tennyson's interest in the Arthurian story, and his appointment as Poet Laureate in November 1850 was probably the incentive which caused him to take up once again a theme so acceptable to his English audience and yet so relevant as a warning to his materialistic age.

The Arthurian legend was 'a painted battle' (CA 121) which Tennyson, over a period of many years, was to study, rework and allegorize. This study enabled him to formulate his own philosophy of life and, indeed, to express his opinions concerning the meaning of life. He saw in this painted battle, fought on the 'tableland of life' (HT p.443), a most relevant application of Arthur's conviction that 'only when man has served his fellows is he fully prepared to serve God'.²⁶ How he utilized the Arthurian material available to him in composing his Idylls of the King will be examined in Chapter One.

CHAPTER ONETENNYSON'S USE OF HIS MAJOR SOURCES

'...or him of Malleor's...' ('To the Queen' 42)

Tennyson's Interest in Arthurian Legend

Although the Idylls of the King was published in its final form only in 1889 when he was eighty years of age, Tennyson's interest in the Arthurian legend had been one of the consuming passions of his life. That this interest began at an early age may be seen both from a statement in one of his manuscripts,¹ and from his early Arthurian poems and unpublished prose drafts of plays dealing with Arthurian themes. His tours of Cornwall and Wales were specifically for the purpose of Arthurian research.

First of Tennyson's Arthurian poems was 'Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere' (1830), relating the same episode as told later in two of the idylls, viz. in 'Guinevere' (1859), 375-97, and 'The Coming of Arthur' (1869), 446-51. Another Arthurian reference occurs in 'The Palace of Art' (1832):

Or mythic Uther's deeply-wounded son
In some fair space of sloping greens
Lay, dozing in the vale of Avalon,
And watched by weeping queens (105-8).

A large portion of the history of King Arthur, later related in 'The Passing of Arthur' (1869), is foreshadowed here.

An Italian novelette, Donna di Scalotta, provided the inspiration for another of Tennyson's Arthurian poems, 'The Lady of

Shalott' in 1832.² It was only later that Tennyson read Malory's version of Elaine, the Maid of Astolat, source of one of his earliest idylls, viz. 'Elaine', first published in 1859. Then, in 1833-4, he composed his first major Arthurian poem, the 'Morte d'Arthur' which was published in 1842. Unfortunately a leading critic and personal friend, John Stirling, while praising the volume, severely criticized³ the 'Morte d'Arthur', which he castigated as one of the 'fancy pieces' on account of their borrowed themes which he considered had become very dated. Nevertheless he praised these poems for their 'vividness and grace of imagery'. He then singled out the 'Morte d'Arthur', declaring it 'a less costly jewel-work, with fewer of the broad flashes of passionate imagery', and criticized Tennyson's use of the miraculous as 'a mere ingenious exercise of fancy'. This criticism effectively cut short Tennyson's endeavour to develop the Arthurian theme which had also inspired 'The Epic' and 'Sir Galahad' in the 1842 volume. In fact, he declared later that he had had the whole Arthurian scheme in his mind and could have done it without any trouble had it not been for the adverse reviews.⁴

His interest in Arthurian legend is evidenced not only by these early poems but also by the three extant prose drafts for epics or scenarios which he drew up during this same period of the 1830s.⁵ The first, composed in 1833, was entitled simply 'King Arthur'. In it, the sacred mount of Camelot 'rose from the deeps', but there was a prophecy that the city 'would topple into the abyss and be no more'.⁶ This draft, although it evidences similarities of imagery with the later

idylls, does not incorporate the allegorical undertones of the Idylls of the King, and is closer to a romantic epic. Another memorandum, which was probably written in 1833 or 1834, does, however, have allegorical intent as King Arthur there represents Religious Faith; Modred, the sceptical understanding; Merlin, science; Excalibur, war; and the Round Table, liberal institutions. This allegorizing is not merely ornamental but seems to be a serious attempt to grapple with contemporary problems. But later, in the Idylls, Tennyson discarded the idea of such strict allegory and employed what he called a 'parabolic drift' in order to suggest his themes.

Then, also before 1840, Tennyson devised an Arthurian scenario in three acts. What is of interest here is the important role played by Sir Mordred. He 'inveighs against the King and the Round Table' in Act One; incurs Arthur's extreme displeasure in Act Two; consults Merlin and argues with Arthur in Act Three; and discovers Lancelot and Guinevere together in Act Four. The first three acts are very differently structured to the Idylls and, although they contain many of the details later expanded by Tennyson, what is particularly noticeable is the lack of any reference to the Grail quest. Possibly, even at that early stage, Tennyson experienced difficulties in deciding how to approach a modern version of the Grail quest. What he wrote in this connection in 1859 was probably as valid in previous years: 'I doubt whether such a subject as the San Graal could be handled in these days without incurring a charge of irreverence. It would be too much like playing with sacred things' (HT 441).

On account of John Stirling's review Tennyson concentrated on non-Arthurian themes for more than a decade, his major poems in this time being 'The Princess' (1847), 'In Memoriam' (1850), and 'Maud' (1855). But his interest in the legend did not diminish, for he undertook numerous tours of Cornwall and Wales in search of suitable material, and he also visited Glastonbury, Salisbury, Amesbury and the New Forest.⁷ In 1848 he went to Cornwall where he discussed Arthurian legend with the Rev. Stephen Hawker, an Arthurian scholar, and in July 1856 he visited Wales as he 'was anxious to gather impressions for the Geraint story'.⁸ He even undertook a study of Welsh in order to decipher some original manuscripts of the Hanes Cymru, Llywarch Hen and the Mabinogion.

The Mabinogion as Source Material

The Mabinogion is a definite source for the Idylls, although it is not nearly as important as Malory's Morte Darthur. It supplies the plot for the two idylls, 'The Marriage of Geraint' and 'Geraint and Enid'. Tennyson's treatment of it gives thematic unity to the roles of Enid and Geraint by presenting the former as the spiritual antithesis of the sensuous Vivien, and the latter as the knight 'who takes true for false by reaching impulsive conclusions on the basis of outward appearances'.⁹

Tennyson achieves this thematic unity primarily by recasting the incidents related in the Mabinogion in a different sequence and interpolating both supplementary narrative and, at the beginning of 'Geraint and Enid', interpretative comment.

The changed sequence may be noted right at the start, as the introduction to 'Geraint the Son of Erbin' which reads 'Arthur was accustomed to hold his court at Caerlleon upon Usk', appears as lines 145-6 of 'The Marriage of Geraint':

For Arthur on the Whitsuntide before
Held court at old Caerleon upon Usk (MG 145-6).

The idyll, by contrast, begins with an account of Geraint's love for Enid and his fears that she will be tainted by her intimacy with Guinevere, for he has heard a rumour which

...rose about the Queen,
Touching her guilty love for Lancelot (MG 24-5).

It is this fear that causes him to request Arthur's permission to return to his own lands and, once there, to misinterpret the circumstantial evidence of Enid's tears and half-audible words. The Mabinogion does not suggest this motivation as Geraint there leaves the Court following a request by his father whose lands are being devastated by bandits. From the time of Geraint's departure, Tennyson traces the knight's over-solicitous caring for Enid until he becomes so 'forgetful of his glory and his name' (MG 53) that Enid blames herself for the change. Then follows the episode when her mournful words, 'I fear that I am no true wife' (MG 108) re-awaken his fears that she has been tainted by Guinevere and, at this stage, Tennyson's relates the Mabinogion introduction as a flash-back. (145-839). The flash-back is framed by important references to the dress 'of faded silk' (MG 134), her 'worst and meanest dress' (MG.848), to which Tennyson attaches great symbolic importance as it relates to the theme of the true and the false. In the Mabinogion, however, it is used mainly as a means of humiliating Enid.

Tennyson then introduces the second Geraint idyll with lines which emphasize this theme:

O purblind race of miserable men,
 How many among us at this very hour
 Do forge a life-long trouble for ourselves,
 By taking true for false, or false for true;
 Here, through the feeble twilight of this world
 Groping, how many, until we pass and reach
 That other, where we see as we are seen! (GE 1-7)

The Mabinogion, it is true, presents the whole Geraint-Enid misunderstanding as a confusion of the true and the false but lays the stress on the narrative aspect rather than on the thematic symbolism of the episode. Tennyson presents in great detail Geraint's blindness in taking true for false but, in addition, reveals Arthur's own blindness in taking false for true. It is only after Geraint and Enid have left that Arthur realizes that

By having looked too much through alien eyes,
 And wrought too long with delegated hands (GE 891-2)

he has deceived himself into believing that the Round Table has succeeded in establishing and maintaining all his ideals. These idylls indicate that Arthur's blindness has even more serious results than Geraint's. It is caused by his perfection which makes him incapable of paying attention to trifles and rumours and, therefore, keeps him in ignorance of the small beginnings of major ills. This explains why he could not foresee that Guinevere would become attracted to Lancelot whom he sent to bring her to his court, or that the courtly devotion of Lancelot for his Queen could degenerate to an illicit love relationship. In the Geraint idylls Tennyson explores two possible causes of the ultimate collapse of the Round Table: firstly, the propensity of man to take the true for the false or the false for the true and, secondly, Arthur's moral

superiority and perfection which automatically make him set standards of behaviour which men - and women - can possibly achieve but which they cannot maintain.

Apart from the theme, the modifications in structural sequence, and the story after Earl Doorm's death, the narrative line in the two works is virtually identical. Nevertheless, the Welsh tale is felt as a robust romance, whereas the idylls 'leave the reader subtly troubled'.¹⁰ The reason for this vague feeling of unease which comes from the reading of the idylls but not from that of the Mabinogion is twofold: in the idyll, the 'loud whisper' (MG 27) of rumour about the Queen's 'guilty love for Lancelot' (MG 25) is indicative of the part that will be played by Vivien and Modred in exposing this guilty relationship and, secondly, the language of the poem is usually related to predominantly pessimistic imagery, except in the flashback in the 'Marriage of Geraint'. Geraint feels the 'tempest brooding round his heart' (GE.11) and Enid cannot understand what 'made him look so cloudy and so cold' (GE 48). This storm imagery admirably reflects both Geraint's state of mind and the tone of the idyll in which waylaying horsemen wait in the 'gloom' (GE 120) of a forest and the wild Limours is

Borne on a black horse, like a thunder-cloud
Whose skirts are loosened by the breaking storm' (GE 458-9).

In the Mabinogion story, darkness and misunderstanding give way to light and relief. After the incensed Geraint has slain the uncouth Earl Limours (Earl Doorm in the Idylls), Enid is terrified when they come across the Little King, thinking that he will kill her weakened husband. The Little King befriends

them, however, and, after a few more adventures, Geraint goes towards his own dominions. He disperses the mists of magic by sounding a horn presented to him, 'and thenceforth he reigned ...from that time forth'.¹¹

Tennyson has adapted this section considerably. He has Edyrn and not the Little King confront them - to Enid's great dismay. Even Edyrn's assurance that he has reformed, cannot calm her, and the poet uses the following image to convey the reason for her fear:

In a hollow land,
From which old fires have broken, men may fear
Fresh fire and ruin (GE 820-2).

But then Edyrn describes his visit to Arthur's court where he expected 'to be treated like a wolf' (GE 856) but found 'tenderest courtesy' (GE 861) instead. This whole section, which does not exist in the Mabinogion, represents the poet's attempt to suit the Welsh story to the needs of his Arthuriad. Arthur sets about reforming his land, for Edyrn's dramatic reform has set the example:

Edyrn has done it, weeding all his heart
As I will weed this land before I go' (GE 905-6).

The doubts about the Queen's virtue diminish and 'the spiteful whisper died' (GE 957) in his own country but, in spite of this, the tone of optimism which could be felt in the previous two idylls has gone completely. Geraint returns to his own lands as soon as he can and Tennyson relates that he does not doubt Enid again. This idyllic ending is hardly convincing and the brittleness of this period of calm is exposed in the next idyll when Guinevere's attitude towards Lancelot causes Balin to lose his hard-won self-control.

Tennyson's treatment of this Welsh source material was usually that of selection, of ordering and of imbuing it with symbolic meaning. This appears clearly in his use of the Mabinogion's reference to Enid's 'worst riding-dress'. In the Mabinogion, as was mentioned earlier, Geraint's insistence on this poor dress was merely to humiliate Enid. But Tennyson has treated clothing in a thematic manner throughout the Geraint idylls. Thus, Geraint's superficiality is suggested when he gallops up to Guinevere, his 'purple scarf' (MG 169) flapping, and he himself 'glancing like a dragon-fly / In summer suit and silks of holiday' (MG 172-3). The queen specifically asks him to allow her to 'clothe her [i.e. his bride] for her bridals like the sun' (MG 231) and, for this reason, Geraint later puts Enid to the test, requiring that she return with him 'in her faded silk' (MG 762). The previous lines (MG 630-753) relate the history of Enid's precious dress which was stolen by Edyrn's men but which Enid's mother now recovers. In spite of her great disappointment Enid dutifully obeys Geraint and, after arriving at Arthur's court, treasures the old dress, remembering 'how he loved her in it' (MG 843). This dress, then, becomes symbolic of her unswerving love and contrasts strongly with Geraint's 'summer suit and silks of holiday', symbol of his superficiality and consequent inability to distinguish true from false.

Another example of Tennyson's thematic additions to the Mabinogion occurs when Guinevere oversleeps and misses the hunt. In the original Arthur tells the attendants to let her sleep as she would prefer to rest than to see the hunt. Tennyson adds

that she was 'lost in sweet dreams, and dreaming of her love/
For Lancelot (MG 157-8), thereby adding to the Mabinogion tale
in depth of theme.

Eggers summarizes Tennyson's use of the Mabinogion very satisfactorily as follows:

Tennyson renders the same story with close if not complete adherence to the narrative sequence in such a way as to make it an aesthetic whole of significance within the larger sphere of meanings that is the Idylls of the King.¹²

The 'Morte Darthur' as Source Material

Of far greater importance as source reference for the Idylls is Malory's Morte Darthur. Of the ten idylls which Tennyson may be said to have based on Malory, four follow the Morte Darthur fairly closely although not nearly as tightly as the Geraint idylls follow the Mabinogion. 'The Passing of Arthur' relies on Book XXI, chapters 3-5. 'Lancelot and Elaine' takes the tale of the Maid of Astolat from Book XVIII, chapters 9-20 but Tennyson adds the account of Gawain's flirtation and that of Elaine's embroidering Lancelot's shield-case. It should be noted here that Tennyson sometimes develops very fully mere hints found in the Morte Darthur. One such detailed treatment is based on Malory's 'and every day there were justs made for a diamond, who that justed best should have a diamond' (XVIII xxi p.432). Lee comments significantly in this regard:

From this note, casually mentioned at the end of Malory's tale of the fair Maid of Astolat, Tennyson works up the setting and symbolism for his 'Lancelot and Elaine': diamonds from the skeletal head of a dead king are jousted for and won by Lancelot, but thrown away by Guinevere, who is jealous of Elaine.¹³

The third idyll which follows Malory fairly closely is 'Pelleas and Ettarre' which uses Book IV, chapters 21-24, although Tennyson has discarded Malory's ending and has modified the story in such a way as to allow Pelleas' degeneration to become the Red Knight of 'The Last Tournament'. Finally, 'Gareth and Lynette' keeps closely to Book VII, with Beaumains and Gareth the same person. Gareth, in the Idylls, marries Lynette and not Lyonors. Tennyson also abandoned any suggestion of Arthur's adultery with Bellicent.

The remaining six Malory-based idylls exhibit Tennyson's freer use of his sources. 'Balin and Balan' displays some strikingly similar details to Book II but, quite apart from Tennyson's introduction of Vivien, there are major structural variations which make this idyll a highly original work. The meeting of Guinevere and Lancelot in 'the long white walk of lilies' (BB 244) is one such added episode. Similarly, 'The Coming of Arthur' is freely drawn from Book I, chapters 1-5 and chapter 18. It is important to note that Tennyson found no precedent in Malory for attributing Arthur's birth to supernatural causes, (except insofar as Uther's disguise is so excellent in the Morte as to be equivalent, perhaps, to a supernatural transformation). Furthermore, Tennyson often expanded short references in Malory into central episodes. Two of the idylls are examples of this: 'Merlin and Vivien' derives from Book IV, chapter 1, and 'Guinevere' from Book XXI, chapters 7-11. The remaining two idylls may be referred to as highly selective borrowings as most of the Morte Darthur details are omitted and those that are retained undergo a metamorphosis. Thus, 'The Holy Grail' uses

Books XIII-XVII, while 'The Last Tournament' draws upon Books VIII-X, XIX and XX. In this idyll Tennyson gives greater import to the roles of King Mark and Dagonet than does Malory in the Morte Darthur.

Before I compare the treatment of theme, structure and style in the Morte Darthur and the Idylls of the King in order to demonstrate that Tennyson, in adapting Malory, made a positive contribution to the Arthurian tradition in English Literature, I shall compare short extracts from three idylls with their obvious source in the Morte Darthur. Clearly, the more thoroughly Tennyson investigated his sources, the more restricted he was in his manipulation of the historical 'facts' he found there. Consequently, he had to follow the practice of older writers, notably Shakespeare, who 'sought novelty and freshness, of course, but they sought it in presentation, in taking a different view of known facts, in presenting new evidence'.¹⁴ Tennyson did not always keep the detail of the legend but he preserved the 'historical' structure upon which the legend was founded. This 'historical' structure supplied the narrative line but the character presentation and symbolic patterns were always the poet's own.

Tennyson's determination to refashion the symbolic themes of the legend is stated clearly in To the Queen in 1873.¹⁵ He says that his Arthur will represent ideal manhood closed in real man (38) not the 'gray king' (39) of legend who, typical of his times, 'hovered between war and wantonness' (44). It would have been difficult to have presented Malory's Arthur in

Victorian England as a figure to be imitated and for leaders to learn from, as the Arthur of legend was a lusty, adulterous and oftentimes cruel warlord besides being a competent, far-seeing leader and general. Furthermore Tennyson's main reason for redesigning the legend was to shadow Sense at war with Soul and, as Arthur was to be symbolic of Soul, it was necessary to portray him as an ideal man.

Tennyson's early manner of dealing with legend may be seen in this extract from 'Morte D'Arthur' (1833) - later incorporated in 'The Passing of Arthur' (1869) - and Malory's Morte Darthur.

'The Passing of Arthur'
204-6

Morte Darthur Book XXI Chapter V
pp.479-80

But now delay not: take
 Excalibur,
And fling him far into the
 middle mere:
Watch what thou seest, and
 lightly bring me word.

Therefore, said Arthur, take thou
Excalibur, my good sword, and go
with it to yonder water side, and
when thou comest there, I charge
thee throw my sword in that water.
and come again, and tell me what
thou seest. My lord, said
Bedivere, your commandment shall
be done, and lightly bring you
word again.

The two extracts are almost identical in content and tone but display radical differences in style. Tennyson's style is the more dramatic and concise of the two. Instead of giving Bedivere detailed instructions, he simply tells him to 'take Excalibur, /And fling him far into the middle mere'. The double alliteration of this command gives urgency to the utterance and seems rather more in keeping with Arthur's desperate need for haste. The first alliterative play on 'fling...far', and the stress on these words, particularly on 'far' caused by the natural reading of the line as determined by the metre, accentuate the meaning of Arthur's words and help create a rather more graphic picture than Malory's. The balance of 'middle

mere' mirrors the ever-widening ripples diverging from the spot where the sword will enter the water. Even his use of 'mere' and not 'water' adds an aura of historicity to the total impression. Furthermore, by transferring the adverb 'lightly' from Bedivere's reply to Arthur's command, Tennyson implies that an expected promise will be fulfilled, viz. that the Lady of the Lake will reclaim Excalibur. Bedivere is ignorant of Arthur's expectations; consequently, when he promises, in Malory's version, to 'lightly bring you word again' he is simply voicing his confidence that he will be able to fulfil the command easily. The irony implicit in Malory's version is lost in Tennyson's.

In spite of these slight variations which nevertheless alter the style of the extract, Tennyson's faithful adherence to his source is clear. Such close parallel between poem and source occurs very often not only in the early idylls but in the later ones as well. But the two 'framing' idylls, viz. 'The Coming of Arthur' and 'The Passing of Arthur', tend to have a far greater incidence of such close borrowings than do the ten idylls comprising *The Round Table*. It was clearly part of Tennyson's intention to place the tableaux of the Round Table between the epic-style accounts of the birth and death of Arthur, and reveal the progression of his themes in the less heroic style of the central idylls.

The Morte Darthur allows its themes to evolve from the narrative. In the Idylls of the King the narrative often seems to evolve from the theme, or to have been adapted from Malory's source in order to embody certain predetermined themes. When

this occurs, Tennyson's version is usually longer than that of Malory but it is seldom less dramatic. This is possibly because the Victorian poet often treats the psychological reasons for peoples' actions; something which Malory made no pretence of doing. In the story of Pelleas and Ettarre, a middle idyll (1869), the following extract may illustrate this statement.

'Pelleas and Ettarre'
436-46

Morte Darthur Book IV Chapter XXII
p.93

And so went back, and seeing
them yet in sleep,
Said, 'Ye, that so dishallow
the holy sleep,
Your sleep is death,' and
drew the sword, and thought,
'What! slay a sleeping
knight? the King hath bound
And sworn me to this
brotherhood', again
'Alas that ever a knight
should be so false'.
Then turned, and so returned,
and groaning laid
The naked sword athwart
their naked throats,
There left it, and them
sleeping; and she lay,
The circlet of the tourney
round her brows,
And the sword of the tourney
across her throat.

And when he came to the pavilions,
he tied his horse to a tree, and
pulled out his sword naked in his
hand, and went to them there as
they lay, and yet he thought it
were a shame to slay them sleeping,
and laid the naked sword over-
thwart both their throats, and
so took his horse and rode his
way.

There can be no doubt that Tennyson here used Malory as his source. The 'naked' sword and the use of 'over-thwart/athwart' substantiate this, as does the narrative thread which is identical in both passages. But Tennyson is also incorporating one of the basic ideas of the Idylls, viz. the integrity of knighthood, an integrity which originated when Arthur

'Bound them by so strait vows to his own self' (CA 261). Pelleas, at this stage, respects his vows and will not 'slay a sleeping knight'. Gawain, on the other hand, has broken his vows

and has undermined the solidarity of Arthur's order. Malory's account is full of energy in spite of, or perhaps because of, its syntactical 'unconcern for rules or proper relation, coordination and subordination'.¹⁶ The earlier writer's use of the paratactic style is particularly noticeable in this extract, with seven of the ten verbs being introduced by 'and'. Malory's account is basic, stripped of unnecessary description or comment. Tennyson, on the other hand, gives us a glimpse into Pelleas' soul; we can experience his indecision and agony of mind as he 'turned, and so returned, and groaning laid / The naked sword athwart their naked throats'. The repetition of 'naked' is physically suggestive. But it also stresses the vulnerability of the guilty pair, thereby increasing the virtue of Pelleas' decision to spare them. The striking antithesis of the last two lines, typical of Tennyson's ability to marry diction and symbolism, encapsulates the theme of the story borrowed from Malory:

The circlet of the tourney round her brows,
And the sword of the tourney round her throat (PE 445-6).

The time of blind, accepting faith has passed, and the stark reality of human frailty has replaced it. Tennyson's treatment of this episode from Malory reflects his whole approach to his use of source material: he assimilates the legends, and then develops such episodes as are relevant to his purposes in such a way as to portray his themes in the Arthurian mode.

A third important aspect of Tennyson's use of Malory appears particularly in his later idylls when, prior to the final ordering of the series, he is engaged in supplying links between his previously written idylls. At this stage in the 1870s the

poet's degree of dependence on his sources varies according to his thematic requirements. For example, apart from the tragic ending and some incidental details, 'Balin and Balan' (1874) has very little in common with the Morte Darthur account of the two brothers. There is a great deal of thematic stress in the idyll which is not to be found in Malory's second book. Balin's unintentional presence at one of Guinevere and Lancelot's meetings (235-75) illustrates this point. But even where the two works seem to be more comparable, there are major differences as the following extracts show.

'Balin and Balan' 615-20

Balan answered low
 'Goodnight, true brother
 here! goodmorrow there!
 We two were born together,
 and we die
 Together by one doom:' and
 while he spoke
 Closed his death drowsing
 eyes, and slept the sleep
 With Balin, either locked in
 either's arm.

Morte Darthur Book II xviii

pp.62-3.

Now, said Balin, when we are
 buried in one tomb, and the
 mention made over us how two
 brothers slew each other,
 there will never good knight
 nor good man see the tomb but
 they will pray for our souls.

Tennyson's use of 'doom' is of importance here as in the final plan of the Idylls the brothers were doomed, not by any mystical power, but by their involvement in the war between Sense and Soul, intensified by Balin's inability to control his temper. This involvement begins when Balin sees the Queen and Lancelot together in the 'garden nigh the hall' (BB 236) and forces are set in motion which, like Balin's horse,

Rolling back upon Balin, crushed the man
 Inward, and either fell, and swooned away (BB 553-4).

In the Morte Darthur the brothers were doomed mainly because of Balin's refusal to return the sword which he had pulled out of the stone in spite of the damsel's prophecy that the 'sword shall be your destruction' (Malory II ii p.50).

Although Tennyson in this extract maintains his usual poetic balance, as in 'goodnight here...goodmorrow there', his euphemistic 'goodnight' and 'death-drowsing' sentimentalizes death. Malory's tone implies a more resigned acceptance of death. Generally Tennyson succeeds in using Malory's narrative effectively, in the sense of making his adaptation suitable for his own purposes and themes. Occasionally, however, instead of making this material 'old-new', he lapses into sentimentality and/or ornateness and his work appears far less vigorous than the original.

On many occasions, though, Tennyson succeeds in conveying specific themes in balanced sentences which reflect his own particular style of epigrammatic antithesis:

...as Arthur in the highest
 Leavened the world, so Vivien in the lowest,
 ...
 leavened the hall (MV 138-44).

The obvious antithesis of 'highest' and 'lowest' brings the attention to the opposed 'world' and 'hall', and it appears that Tennyson is accentuating the fact that the 'hall' at Camelot, built by Merlin, forms the complete world for the knights.

Both Malory and Tennyson make regular use of long sentences but Malory's, as has been pointed out, usually have a linear, paratactic design, whereas Tennyson's are more involved syntactically. Nevertheless the poet achieves economy of diction, as may be seen from the following sentence which, besides introducing King Mark as an individual, also expounds the rationale of courtly love:

For he that always bare in bitter grudge
 The slights of Arthur and his Table, Mark
 The Cornish King, had heard a wandering voice,
 Blown into shelter at Tintagil, say
 That out of naked knightlike purity
 Sir Lancelot worshipt no unmarried girl
 But the great Queen herself, fought in her name,
 Swore by her - vows like theirs, that high in heaven
 Love most, but neither marry, nor are given
 In marriage, angels of our Lord's report (MV 6-16).

This reference to angelic love, although in keeping with the philosophy of courtly love, does not sound convincing to a modern reader. Consequently, Tennyson uses it to demonstrate the inherent weakness of Arthur's 'hall'. Vivien is eager to disprove the validity of the knights' vows and expose

That old true filth, and bottom of the well,
 Where Truth is hidden (MV 47-8).

This new onslaught of the flesh, this unending campaign of Sense against Soul, is particularly reminiscent of the first recorded onslaught which resulted in Arthur's birth, when

...Uther in his wrath and heat besieged
 Ygerne within Tintagil (CA 197-8).

The 'wrath and heat' of Uther contrasts strongly with the 'knightlike purity' of Sir Lancelot but, as Vivien cynically suspects, both men are led by the same passions. Unfortunately Tennyson, by not stating categorically that Lancelot yielded to the pleasures of the flesh, has earned for himself and for the Idylls the stigma of prudery. Malory, on the other hand, without coarseness, concedes Lancelot's guilt. It should be noted, however, that the editions of the Morte Darthur available to Tennyson were also based on Caxton's partly expurgated printing and did not contain the full details of Malory's original manuscript.¹⁷

In the same way as the 19th Century editions of the Morte Darthur occasionally appear emasculated when compared with the Winchester manuscript, certain Victorian attitudes towards sex, embodied in the Idylls, emasculate even these 19th Century editions of Malory. This can be seen in the episode involving Gawain, Pelleas and Ettarre. Gawain gives Pelleas his word that he will do his 'true part that ye shall not fail to have the love of her' (Malory IV, xxi, p.92). By a stratagem he gets Ettarre to receive him in her pavilion. Both accounts state that she then 'granted him to fulfil all his desire'. Tennyson omits any mention of Gawain's being in bed with Ettarre for, even when Pelleas finds the guilty pair, he glosses over the sordid implications of their being together and focuses on the 'circlet', ironically the prize of 'The Tournament of Youth' and therefore symbolic of purity and uprightness.

And in the third, the circlet of the jousts
Bound on her brow, were Gawain and Ettarre (PE 425-6).

The two accounts of this episode polarize the differing aims of the two writers and Tennyson's is not altered simply to cater for the taste of his times. Although Malory's story does suggest the theme of Gawain's dishonour and Pelleas' upholding of knightly standards it is, basically, straightforward narrative. Tennyson, on the other hand, by emphasizing the 'circlet of the jousts' and then ending the episode with the description of Ettarre as she lay

The circlet of the tourney round her brows,
And the sword of the tourney across her throat (PE 445-6),

is using the narrative to amplify the theme of the true and the false which he initiated in his Geraint idylls. He interweaves episode and theme so symbolically that the actual narrative matter, i.e. fornication, becomes of secondary importance.

His use of alliterative description, of parallel syntax, of emphasis by repetition, combine to give his account an individuality which owes very little to Malory.

From the foregoing it appears that Tennyson's handling of his major sources, the Mabinogion and the Morte Darthur, was not merely derivative but was adapted to the poet's thematic requirements in each instance. For example, in the Geraint idylls 'the alterations are easily isolated and are, almost without exception, related to the theme of the true and the false',¹⁸ with the narrative content of both idyll and source remaining almost identical, whereas in 'Balin and Balan' Tennyson has virtually conceived the story anew. Furthermore, Tennyson's use of source material appears to become progressively more confident as he interweaves more and more symbolism from earlier idylls into his later ones and, conversely, uses the later idylls to unite the sometimes isolated details of chronologically earlier poems. To quote Sister Salome again,

The first written idylls thus become the données of the later ones, and these invariably contain earlier theme motifs and images which they elaborate, extend, and intensify.¹⁹

While the Geraint idylls were, to a large degree, merely a symbolic reworking of 'Erec, Son of Erbin', Tennyson's selection from Malory and his treatment of the items selected was far more original. Consequently he made a marked contribution to the Arthurian tradition in English literature as will appear from the following discussion and from the more specific study of his use of Imagery, Structure and Theme in the remaining chapters.

A Comparison between the 'Morte Darthur' and the 'Idylls'

It may be said of Malory that 'with Laȝamon and the author of the alliterative Morte Arthure he shares a disposition to treat romance as fact and to attach an historical and national importance to Arthurian legends'.²⁰ Brewer takes this statement to its logical conclusion when he declares that for Malory 'history was incarnate in the person of Arthur, and in Arthur's achievements and knights. Naturally it was real history-writing, a story, not annals'.²¹ Malory's story is about the rise and fall of King Arthur and the spiritual renaissance of Lancelot, his principal knight, whose deeds are also recorded in detail. Throughout, these two lives are closely interwoven. Arthur's birth follows an unhappy begetting which is contrasted vividly with his subsequent rise to power and his establishment of the Order of the Round Table with its unselfish ideals. His knights, through their quests and adventures, bring glory on the court; the most wonderful quest being that of the Sangreal, to be achieved only by the pure of heart. Lancelot comes close to achieving this quest but, because of his adulterous love for Guinevere, he is unstable in his desire for perfection and can only see the cup veiled. The dilemma is, as Brewer states, 'because he is honourable and loyal, Lancelot cannot desert her [Guinevere]'. Yet he cannot be the lover of Guinevere and remain honourable and loyal to Arthur. His pride must drive these honours and loyalties to destroy each other, and much else'. Unfortunately, the remaining knights are not even as perfect as Lancelot and their human weaknesses become vices when the knights have their idealism

undermined by the illicit relationship of Arthur's leading knight and Guinevere. Arthur's incestuous liaison with his half-sister - unknown to him at the time - is ironically the cause of his downfall as it is Mordred who rebels against his father and mortally wounds him, and 'The whole glorious and humanly insecure institution of chivalry, so briefly once achieved in that England where Malory later contemplated it with joy and sorrow, is brought crashing down'.²²

In spite of his information being collated from widely divergent Celtic, French and English sources, Malory welded them together in a fiercely national, English history. While doing this he is realistic in excluding much of the unreality of miracle and superstition, although much remains. As Brewer states on page 11, his is a genuine attempt to reflect his 'political, military, historical concern'. The Morte Darthur is a personal, human document. It is the history of individuals, usually good individuals, and depicts their rise and the weaknesses leading to their fall. These weaknesses in individuals are usually accentuated by the tensions caused by their peculiar society; tensions between passion and faithfulness, honour and sanctity, glory and shame. And yet these tensions are, paradoxically, closely related to the ideals after which they are striving.

But the Morte Darthur is more than this. It is also a blueprint for an ideal society as it describes what could have been such a society and specifies the reasons for its fall. This blending of the actual with the ideal gives relevance to the tale and

relieves the tragedy of the actual outcome.

Malory relates that Arthur was buried by a monk: an anticlimax humanly speaking and a dashing of all the noble expectations of the Round Table. And this may be some justification for Caxton's title: Morte Darthur. Nevertheless, Malory does not exclude completely all hope of Arthur's reappearance. He concludes Arthur's history by stating that it is traditionally believed that Arthur will come again. The important role of Lancelot in Malory's scheme is shown by the fact that the final six chapters of Book XXI are devoted to him. Tennyson deliberately ignores this section completely in his Idylls.

Malory was fortunate inasmuch as he could assume that his readers would accept the pseudo-historical details of Arthur's era. This is shown by his straightforward, authoritative introduction to the Morte Darthur when he simply declares, as if it was historical fact, that

It befell in the days of Uther Pendragon, when he was king of all England, and so reigned, that there was a mighty duke in Cornwall that held war against him long time. And the duke was named the duke of Tintagil
(Malory I,i,p.25).

He continues his narrative, describing Arthur's attempts to win Igraine from her husband, the duke of Tintagil; attempts which culminate in the death of the duke and, three hours later, in Uther's deception of Igraine and her conceiving his child.

Malory then rounds off the incident as follows:

But when the lady heard tell of the duke her husband, and by all record he was dead or ever king Uther came to her, then she marvelled who that might be that came to her in likeness of her lord; so she mourned privily and held her peace. Then all the barons by one assent prayed the king of accord between the lady Igraine and him. The king gave them leave, for fain would he have been accorded with her.

So the king put all the trust in Ulfius to entreat between them; so, by the entreat, at the last the king and she met together. Now will we do well, said Ulfius: our king is a lusty knight and wifeless, and my lady Igraine is a passing fair lady; it were great joy unto us all and it might please the king to make her his queen. Unto that they were all well accorded, and moved it to the king: and anon, like a lusty knight, he assented thereto with good will, and so in all haste they were married in a morning with great mirth and joy (Malory I,ii,pp.26-7).

An aura of historicity is thus given to Arthur's birth; and Merlin's foresight in exacting a promise from Uther whereby the magician takes control of the new-born child, saves young Arthur's life when Uther dies two years later. In the context of Malory's story an unquestioning acceptance of these 'facts' seems credible. Tennyson, however, could not presume to approach his sophisticated 19th Century audience - and battery of critics - in a similarly naive manner. Nor would it have suited his purposes to do so as he 'saw in the trials of a medieval hero the challenges which faced the political leaders of his own era'²³ and wanted his Idylls of the King to be symbolic of an ideal which, even if unobtainable, could serve as the goal of a new order. The amoral background of Malory's Arthur would not have suited this symbolism and, consequently, although the accounts of Bedivere and Bellicent incorporate virtually all the details regarding Arthur's birth which are stated as factual in Malory, Tennyson presents them as surmise; and Leodogran is not convinced of Arthur's kingship until, in his dream, 'the King stood out in heaven,/Crowned' (CA 442-3).

It is significant to note that Tennyson has Leodogran see, or rather feel, the truth in a dream for, in spite of being more wary of inserting preternatural deus ex machina solutions than even Malory was, the poet regularly utilizes the 'dream' device

in order to convey a degree of symbolism which is not often found in the Morte Darthur. The reason for this difference in symbolic depth may be found in the divergent aims of the two writers. Malory's purpose was primarily to celebrate Arthur as a military leader and, therefore, most of his efforts 'were directed toward the creation of an uncomplicated and relatively fast moving narrative'.²⁴ This can be seen by a comparison between the Morte Darthur and Malory's major source, the Morte Arthure, which indicates clearly that the later writer omitted many scenic descriptions, accounts of feasts, and detailed descriptions of specific items. Tennyson's Arthur, conversely, was to be the ideal man and leader whose every word and action was to be interpreted symbolically. In the Idylls of the King but not in the Morte Darthur dreams play an important thematic role in bearing the message implicit in the total poem, viz. that man's endeavours cannot be determined by material circumstances only but must take into account the world of the spirit. It is only by the acceptance of the otherworldliness of man that a relatively satisfactory adaptation can be made to the conditions and circumstances of life. Symbolically, then, moments of truth are revealed by the poet during dream situations. This can be seen in the series of dreams which form an ongoing design through the Idylls. Dreams - inserted by Tennyson but not found in the Morte Darthur - in 'The Coming of Arthur', 'The Holy Grail', 'Pelleas and Ettarre', 'The Last Tournament' and 'The Passing of Arthur' illustrate this point.

Leodogran's indecision is the result of his weighing a mass of hearsay evidence regarding Arthur's birth. This Tennyson symbolizes by having him dream of 'a phantom king, / Now looming

and now lost' (CA 429-30), thereby indicating that there is little likelihood, humanly speaking, of arriving at the truth. But when his dream changes and 'the solid earth became/ As nothing' (CA 441-2), signifying the displacement of fallible human judgment, then 'the King stood out in heaven,/Crowned' (CA 442-3). Leodogran is able, without hesitation, to resolve all his doubts in the certain knowledge that Arthur is, indeed, the divinely appointed king to whom he can entrust his daughter, Guinevere. Ironically, Guinevere is to undermine the ideals of the Round Table.

A following dream is that of Lancelot soon after the death of Elaine. Troubled in spirit on account of his illicit relationship with Guinevere, he participates desperately in the Grail quest in order to do expiation for his sin. But, as he has not succeeded in renouncing his love for the Queen, he cannot attain success. Tennyson, who doubted 'whether such a subject [the Grail quest] could be handled in these days, without incurring a charge of irreverence',²⁵ has Lancelot's dilemma resolved in a dream. Lancelot's account of his experiences in attempting to discover the Grail is made plausible by the introductory 'as in a dream' which allows the reader to suspend his disbelief and accept the symbolism of what follows: In Book XVII Chapter XV Malory says that Lancelot 'wist... that there was the Sangreal within that chamber' but Tennyson has him hear the words

'Glory and joy and honour to our Lord
And to the Holy Vessel of the Grail' (HG 836-7).

This concentration of description on the object of the quest appears further in the Idylls as Lancelot can say

'O, yet methought I saw the Holy Grail,
 All palled in crimson samite, and around
 Great angels, awful shapes, and wings and eyes'
 (HG 843-5).

Malory, because the Quest is real and no dream, describes the position of a 'table of silver' in the midst of the chamber and, although the holy vessel is mentioned, the angels are described in far greater detail. From this it appears that Tennyson, by foregrounding the Grail, even though he realized that the legend would not be acceptable in its original form, emphasizes the symbolism of the quest and the striving after perfection, whereas Malory is describing the quest mainly as a historical record of an actual happening. Consequently Malory is more interested in shaping the narrative line of his story. As a result the Morte Darthur has a clarity of narrative which Tennyson's more conscious symbolic art cannot match. On the other hand, Tennyson can show up in relief Lancelot's awareness of his sin: '...but for all my madness and my sin' (HG 846), and his realization that his striving after perfection is in vain: '...this Quest was not for me' (HG 849), without the clear warning issued in Malory's: 'Flee Launcelot, and enter not, for thou oughtest not to do it: and if thou enter thou shalt forthink it' (Malory XVII,xv, p.403). Most of the descriptive details of this episode are to be found in both accounts but Tennyson's Arthur then interprets the dream as a sign that Lancelot and most of his knights should never have undertaken the Grail quest. He asks,

'And spake I not too truly ...when I said
 To those who went upon the Holy Quest,
 That most of them would follow wandering fires?'
 (HG 884-7).

He implies that each of them should have acted as he is acting,

and not 'wander from the allotted field/Before his work be done' (HG 904-5). Then they would be in a position to let visions 'come, as they will' (HG.907).

It appears, then, that Tennyson was consistent in exploiting the narrative for the purpose of embodying his themes. For this reason he excludes the account of Lancelot's long coma, his return towards Logris and his adventures before returning to the court. From the moment of Lancelot's swooning the two accounts diverge, Malory's remaining narrative while Tennyson develops the symbolic aspect of the incident. Then Malory relates how Lancelot returned to Camelot and 'ever his thoughts were privily on the queen, and so they loved together more hotter than they did toforehand that many in the court spake of it' (Malory XVIII, i, pp.411-2). Tennyson first introduces the idyll 'Pelleas and Ettarre' before Lancelot and Guinevere, at the end of that idyll, are troubled by Pelleas' hatred. Modred, seeing their dismay thinks: 'The time is hard at hand'. (PE 597). Then both writers continue with the tale of the Maid of Astolat.

The difference in symbolism and tone between the Morte Darthur and the Idylls is particularly noticeable in the two accounts of Pelleas and Ettarre. When Malory's Pelleas found Ettard and Gawaine together he was so grief-stricken that the damsel of the lake 'threw an enchantment on him, and he fell on sleep'. Then she so enchanted Ettard that 'she loved him sore, that well nigh she was out of her mind. ...And then anon Sir Pelleas awaked, and looked upon Ettard. And when he saw her he knew her, and then he hated her more than any woman alive' (Malory IV, xxii, p.94).

In pursuing his theme of the role played by women in the undermining of Round Table ideals, Tennyson has Pelleas transfer his hatred to Guinevere and the Round Table. This occurs after his dream

...that Gawain fired
The hall of Merlin, and the morning star
Reeled in the smoke, brake into flame, and fell (PE 507-9).

The use of star-imagery reinforces the reference to Merlin's hall which was described earlier by Percivale as follows:

And four great zones of sculpture, set betwixt
With many a mystic symbol, gird the hall:
And in the lowest beasts are slaying men,
And in the second men are slaying beasts,
And on the third are warriors, perfect men,
And on the fourth are men with growing wings,
And over all one statue in the mould
Of Arthur, made by Merlin, with a crown,
And peaked wings pointed to the Northern Star (HG 232-40)

But Pelleas' dream also recalls Arthur's fears when he was

In horror lest the work by Merlin wrought,
Dreamlike, should on the sudden vanish, wrapt
In unremorseful folds of rolling fire (HG 259-61).

Such masterly interweaving of repetitive and cyclic imagery in order to present thematic designs is typical of the Idylls and it foregrounds the many parallels to be found in Tennyson's structured planning of his Arthuriad. Ettarre is the partial cause of Pelleas' downfall just as Guinevere is of Arthur's ultimate defeat. Pelleas dreams he sees that the morning star 'reeled' in the smoke, and Arthur, immediately prior to his last dream, muses

'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' (PA 24-6).

Pelleas' dream, not found in the Morte Darthur, is a premonition of the cataclysmic destruction of Arthur's realm. The destruction wrought on the spiritual ideals symbolized by the figures on the Hall at Camelot occurred when the knights, forgetting

themselves,

...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....

So all the ways were safe from shore to shore,
 But in the heart of Arthur pain was lord (LT 468-85).

The last dream referred to in the Idylls, that of King Arthur, does not have similar symbolic characteristics. This is probably due to the fact that Tennyson's poem, the 'Morte d'Arthur', composed in 1833-4, was one of his first attempts to utilize Malory's story. Consequently he remained closer to the purpose of the original, which was simply to have Gawain warn Arthur of the impending disaster. Even so, Tennyson effectively added his personal stamp to the transformation of this incident by having Gawain cry, 'Hollow, hollow, all delight' (PA 33), thereby insinuating that Arthur's efforts had not been in vain. Arthur had made a noble effort to bring about a time of idealism whereas Gawain, by his frivolity, had condemned himself to be everlastingly 'blown along a wandering wind' (PA 36).

The success of both Malory's and Tennyson's Arthurian work may be attributed to the fact that these authors did not merely condense the mass of available material but restructured that which they selected into more compact cycles of their own. Malory, without making very many additions to available themes, selected or omitted as he chose 'in accord with his own ideas of relevance and proportion while remaining true to the "history" '26 which he found in the Vulgate Cycle and other works with which he was familiar. His narrative style is deliberately uncomplicated as he wanted the 'themes' to be deduced from the episodes themselves rather than from any

comment of his, direct or indirect. As a result, he often makes abrupt transitions from major episode to major episode by the simple yet effective device of supplying explanatory transitions such as 'Now leave we of Lucius the emperor, and speak we of King Arthur' (Malory V, iii, p.100), and 'Now leave we these knights prisoners, and speak we of Sir Launcelot du Lake' (Malory VI, iii, p.113).

Tennyson makes equally abrupt transitions, but does not introduce a new episode in this artificial manner. His design is that of ten tableaux comprising the Round Table within the framework of the two idylls, 'The Coming of Arthur' and 'The Passing of Arthur'. Because the tableaux can be viewed either separately or as parts of a larger whole, the links are mainly internal ones and must be assessed in the light of the development of character and theme which they reflect. The first of these, 'Gareth and Lynette'²⁷ does not, therefore, have any such links, nor do the Geraint idylls, as these three idylls primarily set the stage in picturing the Round Table in its early stages of enthusiasm. 'Balin and Balan', however, begins with a direct reference to Arthur's first war - mentioned in 'The Coming of Arthur'. The introduction of Vivien 'from out the court of Mark' (BB 431) prepares the reader for her role in the next idyll, 'Merlin and Vivien'. The remaining idylls all have internal structural links of some sort. In limiting the tableaux to twelve, Tennyson is concentrating attention on certain themes and motifs. One such motif is Camelot, everywhere symbolic of the 'gradual growth of human beliefs and institutions, and of the spiritual development of man'.²⁸ The Idylls of the King may be seen as Tennyson's personal vision of

the brief flowering of a perfect society or, at least, of a society which had the potential to become perfect. By tracing, symbolically, the human frailties which negated Arthur's ideals, Tennyson is sounding a warning to the leaders of his own time.

As Ryals states,

Not without point does Tennyson take such elaborate care to underscore that the knights form an order and that for a little while they and the inhabitants more in harmony with the king. For the city of Camelot is, among other things, Tennyson's metaphor for poetic creation.²⁹

Consequently, the following description of the king's city and of the harmony between Arthur and his knights owes nothing to Malory. It is more in the poetic tradition of Shakespeare's

This happy breed of men, this little world,
This precious stone set in the silver sea,³⁰

as it is not so much what is said but the emotion conveyed that carries conviction. In replying to Gareth's questions about Camelot Merlin declares that Camelot was built to the music of harps, thereby implying that it was based on a harmony of effort and ideals. In the Morte Darthur Camelot, Arthur's headquarters, carries no particular symbolic significance nor does Arthur specifically bind his followers to vows which it is impossible for mortals to keep. But Merlin warns Gareth against listening to those who would declare that King Arthur is only a dreamer of impossible dreams. Merlin affirms his belief in Arthur by stating that he

'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 266-8).

These lines are central to the meaning of Tennyson's *Arthuriad*: the ideal state is founded on obedience to vows taken voluntarily but generously. Without this unselfish determination to live for what is right, there can be no Christian

idealism. Both Malory and Tennyson knew this, but Tennyson saw fit to state it through the symbolism of the vows. When the vows are not taken seriously, disaster follows. Arthur justly reprimands Gawain for not carrying out to the letter his instructions regarding the diamond and declares:

'...ye shall go no more
On quest of mine, seeing that ye forget
Obedience is the courtesy due to kings' (LE 711-3).

Similarly Tristram's cynical remark: 'The vow that binds too strictly snaps itself' (LT 652) is indicative of the degree to which he has fallen away from the idealism of the Round Table. In both these instances Tennyson has drawn nothing from Malory who did not include Arthur's comment on Gawain's disobedience. The Tristram of the Idylls is also vastly different to the upright warrior who could say to the vanquished Palamides: 'Now take your horse...and all your evil will God forgive it you, and I do' (Malory XII, xiv, p.347).

It is primarily Tennyson's development of symbolism, both in language and structure, which determines his selection from and the use he makes of his sources, usually the Morte Darthur but also the Mabinogion and, to a far lesser degree, the others mentioned in the Introduction. A few comparisons between the narrative, chronicle-style presentation of Malory and the often more dramatic, symbolic approach of Tennyson should make this point clear. This does not, however, imply that Malory is usually lacking in dramatic vividness and immediacy.

The role of Malory's Guenever up to and including the time of her marriage to Arthur is a relatively superficial, two-dimensional one,³¹ colourless by comparison with her later

appearances where she emerges as Arthur's passionate, vital Queen.³² From the very outset, however, Tennyson focuses our attention on Guinevere. She is, in the Idylls, together with Arthur and Lancelot, fundamental to the cyclical progression of all his major themes. He achieves this, structurally, by drawing attention to her in the first four lines of the poem and then by giving intimate personal glimpses regularly throughout this first idyll. It was Guinevere who, although she 'stood by the castle walls to watch him pass (CA 48)...saw him not, or marked not, if she saw,/One among many, though his face was bare' (CA 53-4). Because the Idylls is a shorter work than the Morte Darthur and is designed specifically to embody certain themes, Guinevere's personality traits are foregrounded rather more graphically here than in the Morte Darthur. This is not to say that Malory did not present her realistically, merely that he enlivens her at a more leisurely pace than Tennyson had time to do.

The significance which Tennyson attached to this initial oversight of Guinevere's is seen clearly towards the end of the Idylls when the repentant Guinevere cries out in despair:

'...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' (G 649-56).

Arthur, on the other hand, immediately 'Felt the light of her eyes into his life/Smite on the sudden' (CA 55-6), and was convinced that

'...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 89-93).

This sense of proportion and balance is one of the major literary characteristics of the Idylls in addition to being an important structural feature. Whereas in the Morte Darthur the multiplicity of characters makes such balance difficult, in the Idylls Tennyson limits their number in an attempt to increase their symbolic or parabolic role. Thematic opposites are developed within the basic structure of the narrative: thus, complete integrity but naivety is personified in Gareth as against a superficial nobility in the shallow Gawain; varying degrees of impetuosity and cynicism may be found in Balin and Tristram; wilfulness, as it appears in the upright and the wicked, is mirrored in Lynette and Ettarre; while the conversion or degeneration of marred human nature appears in the opposing pairs, Guinevere and Lancelot; Vivien and Mark. Malory's story does not envisage a similar symbolism. People are painted realistically - often more realistically than in Tennyson's account - but more for the sake of convincing narration than for that of theme or symbolism.

Another vital difference between the Morte Darthur and the Idylls of the King may be seen in their varying accounts of Arthur's birth and, following these, their treatment of the mature Arthur as either a great leader or as an ideal man and king. Leodogran's soul-searching, his doubts regarding Arthur's kingship and therefore his position with regard to Guinevere, enable Tennyson to discuss Arthur's parentage and background in such a way that his natural birth is affirmed but his

preternatural appearance as Uther's successor is also stressed:

...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 (CA 381-3).

Malory's King Leodegrance had no such doubts about Arthur's position as king. He was so pleased that 'so worthy a king of prowess and noblesse' (Malory III, i, p.64) wanted to marry his daughter that, realizing that Arthur would not value additional lands as a wedding gift, decided, 'I shall send him a gift shall please him much more, for I shall give him the Table Round, the which Uther Pendragon gave me' (Malory III, i, p.64).

Tennyson's account continues with the marriage of Arthur and Guinevere at the sacred altar which 'blossomed white with May' (CA 460), Dubric's blessing being

'Reign ye, and live and love, and make the world
 Other, and may thy Queen be one with thee,
 And all this Order of thy Table Round
 Fulfil the boundless purpose of their king' (CA 471-4).

Similar symbolic details do not occur in the Morte Darthur as Malory simply records that

Then was the high feast made ready, and the king was
 wedded at Camelot unto Dame Guenever in the church of
 Saint Stephen's, with great solemnity (Malory III, v, p.66).

There is a unity and consistent development in Tennyson's presentation of Guinevere which encompasses imagery, structure and theme. It is a unity which is not attempted by Malory who also depicted Arthur as a more ordinary mortal than Tennyson's king. Tennyson, of course, had the advantage of working mainly from one well-established source and could, with some sort of hindsight, achieve this unity and consistency. In the earlier parts of the Morte Darthur Malory viewed Arthur primarily as

a victorious chieftain and, consequently, could accept his sexual relationships with equanimity. So we read that, when Lionors came to do homage, 'king Arthur set his love greatly upon her, and so did she upon him, and she bare a child and his name was Borre, that was after a good knight and of the Table Round' (Malory I, xv, p.41). Later, not knowing that Lot's wife was his half-sister, 'the king cast great love unto her and so was Mordred born' (Malory I, xvii, p.42). Although Tennyson allows that Arthur is mistaken in having 'wrought too long with delegated hands' (GE 892), the Arthur of the Idylls is symbolic of a perfection which is almost superhuman and therefore out of touch with his very human queen. Merlin's downfall was the result of Vivien's chagrin when her attempts to seduce the gentlemanly Arthur met with no success. Arthur simply had 'gazed upon her blankly and gone by' (MV 159) when she behaved coquettishly towards him, a reaction impossible to the Arthur of the first books of the Morte Darthur. In later books, however, especially after the Grail episode, Malory's Arthur works out the ideals of chivalry for his Order. For this reason Malory could state that 'then was love truth and faithfulness. And lo in likewise was used love in Arthur's days' (Malory XVIII, xxv, p.437). The gentleness of chivalry, completely lacking in the early Arthur, appears when he comforts the wounded Sir Urre's mother with the words: 'I shall begin to handle him...not presuming upon me that I am so worthy to heal your son by my deeds, but I will encourage other men of worship to do as I will do' (Malory XIX, x, p.447). Tennyson's Arthur can maintain high ideals right from the start: indeed he must do so. It is for this reason, perhaps, that Merlin's warning to Arthur regarding the inevitable unfaithfulness of

Guinevere (Malory III, i, p.64) does not appear in the Idylls. Tennyson perhaps suggests this when Arthur charges Lancelot 'to ride forth/And bring the Queen' (CA 447-8). In his relationship to Guinevere he is particularly beyond reproach, although Tennyson does succeed in capturing some of the vitality of Malory's Arthur in his account of the physical desire he experiences when he sees Guinevere for the first time. But, even so, he sublimates this desire in a manner completely foreign to Malory's King.

And Arthur, passing thence to battle, felt
Travail, and throes and agonies of the life,
Desiring to be joined with Guinevere (CA 74-6).

The question arises whether Arthur, with his superhuman ability to see 'the smallest rock far on the faintest hill' (CA 98) is morally unable to see that human imperfections cannot be completely overcome. Alternatively, is he the embodiment of a possible premise of Tennyson's that perfection, in order to affect imperfection, must make actual physical contact with these human frailties? Probably Arthur does not conscientiously think of marriage to Guinevere as his ideal contact with the world but as the necessary result of a powerful love and physical desire. Her beauty distracts him from his mission, makes the earth 'hollow' and causes him to be 'vext with waste dreams' (CA 83-4). Arthur is more than human in many ways, and this causes him to overlook the many faint indications of rift in his Order. But he is also excessively human in his love for Guinevere and the sincerity of this love may be felt in his last words to her:

'My love through flesh hath wrought into my life
So far, that my doom is, I love thee still.
Let no man dream but that I love thee still' (G 555-7).

In deciding to lift Guinevere 'from this land of beasts/Unto my throne' (CA 79-80), Arthur equates Guinevere with man's higher, not his bestial, nature, imagining that union with her will assist him in his attempts to rid the dead world of wickedness and unbelief. He cannot foresee that Guinevere's role will be to taint his Order and cause Camelot to change from a city 'built to music' (GL 272-3) into a 'black nest of rats' (PE 544). Her adultery causes disillusion and madness in Balin and Pelleas; unsettles Geraint to such an extent that he distrusts Enid; gives Mark and Vivien reason to believe that Arthur's standards are mere hypocrisy; and, ultimately, so undermines the Order that Modred's rebellion is simply the last link in the chain of destruction, symbolized by Arthur as follows:

The children born of thee are sword and fire,
 Red ruin, and the breaking up of laws,
 The craft of kindred and the godless hosts
 Of heathen swarming o'er the Northern Sea (G 422-5).

In the Morte Darthur Arthur's relationship with Guinevere does not have the same degree of initial romance and pervading religious significance. He decides to marry because his barons demand it, and acts only on Merlin's advice, finally choosing Guinevere as the one he loves above all others.

So it fell on a time king Arthur said unto Merlin,
 My barons will let me have no rest, but needs I must take
 a wife, and I will none take but by thy counsel and by
 thine advice. It is well done, said Merlin, that ye take
 a wife, for a man of your bounty and nobleness should not
 be without a wife. Now is there any that ye love more
 than another? Yea, said king Arthur, I love Guenever,
 the daughter of King Leodegrance, of the land of Camiliard,
 which Leodegrance holdeth in his house the Table Round,
 that ye told he had of my father, Uther. And this damsel
 is the most valiant and fairest lady that I know living,
 or yet that ever I could find. Sir, said Merlin, as of
 her beauty and fairness she is one of the fairest on live.
 But and ye loved her not so well as ye do, I could find you
 a damsel of beauty and of goodness that should like you

and please you, and your heart were not set; but there as a man's heart is set, he will be loth to return. That is truth, said king Arthur. But Merlin warned the king covertly that Guenever was not wholesome for him to take to wife, for he warned him that Launcelot should love her, and she him again; and so he turned his tale to the adventures of the Sangreal (Malory III, i, p.64).

The difference in tone between the two accounts is very noticeable. Malory's paratactic account may appear simplistic, and yet it affords a clear picture of a warlike chieftain for whom the selection of a suitable wife is simply one of the many decisions to be made and then acted upon. The implications of Merlin's warning are accepted merely as an unavoidable risk. He does not foresee the day that he will be forced to say,

'Alas, me sore repenteth,...that ever Sir Launcelot should be against me. Now I am sure the noble fellowship of the Round Table is broken for ever, for with him will many a noble knight hold: and now it is fallen so...that I may not with my worship but the queen must suffer the death' (Malory XX, vii, p.457).

Nevertheless it is Merlin who is sent to convey Guenever from King Leodegrance to Arthur's court at Camelot. Cause and result follow naturally in the original story. Tennyson deviates from Malory in having Sir Lancelot fetch Guinevere soon after he and his chief knight

Sware on the field of death a deathless love.
And Arthur said, 'Man's word is God in man:
Let chance what will, I trust thee to the death'
(CA 131-3).

Soon afterwards

Arthur charged his warrior whom he loved
And honoured most, Sir Lancelot, to ride forth
And bring the Queen; - and watched him from the gates:
And Lancelot past away among the flowers,
(For then was latter April) and returned
Among the flowers, in May, with Guinevere (CA 446-51).

There is no suggestion here of their subsequent liaison but this incident is recalled and becomes thematically significant when Lancelot and Guinevere come together later in the Idylls.

The nobility of tone of the first three lines and the romantic undertones of the last six lines quoted here underscore the dramatic irony of Tennyson's new presentation of the legend. The theme, influenced by Darwin, of Man's higher nature rising out of his lower and possibly regressing, is suggested by Arthur's hopes of lifting Guinevere 'from this land of beasts/ Up to my throne' with a view to revivifying the 'dead world'. The expectations cherished by Arthur as he watched Lancelot depart on his mission, and which seem to be realized after his marriage when he

Drew in the petty princedoms under him,
Fought, and in twelve great battles overcame
The heathen hordes, and made a realm and reigned
(CA 516-18),

are progressively whittled away by the 'new disease' (G 515) of Guinevere's sin.

Similar thematic and structural differences are apparent in Tennyson's treatment of the Pelleas and Ettarre story. In the Morte Darthur we read that Pelleas 'loveth a great lady in this country and her name is Ettard' (Malory IV, xx, p.91). There is no reference to their first meeting or to his comparing of Ettard's beauty with that of Guenevere. Tennyson, however, goes into great detail in this regard as he is not merely recounting one incident in a series of many such, but he is using it as symbolic of problems which complicate human relationships and bring about the collapse of trust and mutual esteem. The problem in this instance is one of delusion, of confusing the actual with the ideal. Ettarre is undoubtedly a woman of great physical beauty, and Pelleas, in his innocence and unsophisticated acceptance of appearances, thinks this

beauty reflects 'the beauty of her soul' (PE 75). He is blind to the fact that her eyes betray her inner soul, being, as they are, 'the haunts of scorn' (PE 71). There are many other instances of this type of delusion in the Idylls. Balin will not allow himself to believe the evidence of his own eyes and desperately affirms to Garlon that Guinevere is 'fairest, best and purest' (BB 345). Merlin smiles at Vivien 'as a master smiles at one/That is not of his school' (MV 660-1), and the knights go off in search of 'wandering fires' when they seek the Grail. Pelleas can see only her 'violet eyes' (PE 67), her beautiful complexion, her slender hand and all the other external attributes of beauty. Her spiritual poverty cannot be seen as he ascribes 'all the young beauty of his own soul to hers' (PE 79). This evocative description of the worldly Ettarre is drawn by Tennyson in order to demonstrate that there is no close correlation between appearance and reality. This is a major theme throughout the Idylls, a theme which has no place in the Morte Darthur. The Morte Darthur, ostensibly a 'history', has as its underlying purpose to record how people act, not, in the first instance, what motivates their actions, or the presentation of certain predetermined themes. Tennyson's description of Ettarre through Pelleas' eyes at first seems unnecessarily florid but his careful lexical choice should be noted. 'Stainless' has the dual implication of purity and beauty both of soul and body but the phrase 'the haunts of scorn' sets it in perspective and the characterization progresses to the poet's own assessment of Pelleas' blindness - similar to that of Arthur on first seeing Guinevere. As 'the beauty of her flesh abashed' Pelleas, so had Arthur 'felt the light of her eyes into his life/Smite on the sudden' (CA 56-7), and

'felt/Travail, and throes and agonies of the life,/Desiring to be joined with Guinevere' (CA 74-6). But there is an important difference between the attitudes of Arthur and Pelleas: Arthur loves impulsively yet responsibly as he 'rode on' (CA 57), whereas Pelleas 'let the strong hand, which had overthrown/Her minion - knights, by those he overthrew/Be bounden...' (PE 226-8).

Yet another basic difference in approach between the two writers becomes apparent at this stage. In spite of being committed to a narrative, i.e. factual, approach, Malory initially employs magic and deus ex machina interventions in his story. In order to punish Ettard, Nimue 'threw such an enchantment upon her that she loved him sore, that well nigh she was out of her mind. Alas! said the lady Ettard, how is it befallen unto me that I love now him that I have most hated of any man alive... Pelleas said: Away, traitress, come never in my sight. And when she heard him say so, she wept and made great sorrow out of measure....So the lady Ettard died for sorrow, and the damsel of the lake rejoiced Sir Pelleas, and lived together during their life days' (Malory IV, xxii & xxiii, P.94).³³ Tennyson, more credibly relates that her 'ever-veering fancy turned/To Pelleas, as the one time knight on earth,

And only lover; and through her love her life
Wasted and pined, desiring him in vain (PE 483-6).

Another important aspect in which the Idylls modifies the Morte Darthur is that of the redistribution of actions among the protagonists in order to satisfy the requirements of certain themes. It has already been mentioned that Lancelot, not Merlin, is sent to fetch Guinevere. This is the slight

beginning of the circumstances which lead to Guinevere's adultery and underscore the theme of Sense versus Soul. Tennyson also selects from the roles of Elaine, daughter of King Pellles, and Elaine the Maid of Astolat in his account of the part played by the latter, and his account of the Queen's reaction to Lancelot's wearing the Maid of Astolat's token approximates very closely to Guenever's passionate rebuke of Launcelot for having again slept with dame Elaine, Galahad's mother:

Then the queen was nigh out of her wit, and then she
writhed and weltered as a mad woman (Malory XI, viii, p.33).

Tennyson's Guinevere

...felt the knot
Climb in her throat, and with her feet unseen
Crushed the wild passion out against the floor
Beneath the banquet, where the meats became -
As wormwood, and she hated all who pledged (LE 735-9).

Malory's description is starkly realistic as with great economy of words he demonstrates the desperation of the Queen whose extreme jealousy blinds her to the fact that her loyalty is due to her husband. Tennyson presents her as more outwardly controlled but, nevertheless, troubled by the same passions. In addition, though, he describes the snide reactions of the knights, indicative of the undermining of their idealism and proof of the progressive ascendancy of Sense over Soul:

Till even the knights at banquet twice or thrice
Forgot to drink to Lancelot and the Queen,
And pledging Lancelot and the lily maid
Smiled at each other... (LE 731-4).

The foppish Gawain is a somewhat different knight to Malory's Gawaine who, in spite of his failings, exhibits many manly virtues.³⁴ There are certainly many points of resemblance, however. Gawain's role in 'Pelleas and Ettarre' mirrors his

role in Malory's episode. Then, although Malory has Gawaine³⁵ and not Percivale lead the knights in their vows to follow the Grail quest, he has a hermit tell the knight: 'It is a long time passed sith that ye were made knight, and never since thou servedst thy Maker, and now thou art so old a tree, that in thee there is neither life nor fruit', but Gawaine brushes off this rebuke and goes with Sir Ector to see if they 'could find any adventure'. (Malory XVI, v, p.381). In 'The Holy Grail' Gawain likewise brushes off his failure in the quest by remarking to the King:

'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' (HG 861-5).

It is in Arthur's vision prior to the final battle against Modred that Gawain differs in the Morte Darthur and in the Idylls. In the former he is presented as righteous, and his warning to King Arthur is unselfishly directed towards Arthur's good:

'Sir, said Sir Gawaine, all these be ladies for whom I have foughten when I was man living: and all these are those that I did battle for in righteous quarrel. And God hath given them that grace at their great prayer, because I did battle for them, that they should bring me hither unto you, thus much had God given me leave, for to warn you of your death; for and ye fight as to-morn with Sir Mordred, as ye both have assigned, doubt ye not ye must be slain, and the most part of your people on both parties' (Malory XXI, iii, p.477).

In an earlier manuscript³⁶ Tennyson follows Malory's presentation of Gawain but in 'The Passing of Arthur', as in the remaining idylls, Gawain is aligned on the side of Sense in the war against Soul.

Then, ere that last weird battle in the west,
 There came on Arthur sleeping, Gawain killed
 In Lancelot's war, the ghost of Gawain blown
 Along a wandering wind, and past his ear
 Went shrilling, 'Hollow, hollow all delight!
 Hail, King! tomorrow thou shalt pass away.
 Farewell! there is an isle of rest for thee.
 And I am blown along a wandering wind,
 And hollow, hollow, hollow all delight' (PA 29-37).

The many times repeated epithet 'hollow' is well-chosen as it typifies accurately the tenor of Gawain's life as depicted in the Idylls. Gawain's standards are 'hollow' and superficial. This can be seen in his neglect of duty in fulfilling Arthur's express command to deliver the diamond of the tournament to the wounded Lancelot. When he could not find Lancelot easily he was relieved to meet Elaine to whom he

...gave,
 And slightly kissed the hand to which he gave,
 The diamond, and all wearied of the quest
 Leapt on his horse, and carolling as he went
 A true-love ballad, lightly rode away (LE 696-700).

His excuse that he considered it courtesy to have acted in this way elicited an unusually sharp retort from Arthur:

'Too courteous truly! ye shall go no more
 On quest of mine, seeing that ye forget
 Obedience is the courtesy due to kings' (LE 711-13).

Even this reproof made little impression on his frivolous nature. He

Then shook his hair, strode off, and buzzed abroad
 About the maid of Astolat, and her love (LE 717-8).

From the foregoing it is clear that although Tennyson made considerable use of Malory's narrative, he supplied a new thematic frame to the tales and reinforced these themes by means of his use of symbols and imagery throughout. A second important innovation, which has already been mentioned, was a completely new structural design which consisted of a re-ordering of the items selected from his sources, both with regard to the

linear, chronological narrative of the original and the internal structure of the separate episodes. The following section will investigate this aspect of Tennyson's work.

Malory's sources, especially the French Chronicles, employed an intricate system of entrelacement or interweaving of basic themes, causing each theme to recur at fairly regular intervals throughout the story. Malory usually separated the themes obtained from his sources and related them in fairly strict sequence, so that the 'threads of the narrative are unravelled and straightened out so as to form in each case a consistent and self-contained set of adventures'.³⁷ This approach is ideally suited to an extended narrative as it facilitates swift movement and avoids tedium. Tennyson's purposes, however, were not basically narrative but behavioural in the sense that he traces and analyses the actions of the characters in a manner similar to the technique of anticipation employed by, say, Henry James or Jane Austen, in novel writing. This system appealed to him as it suited the cyclicity of his imagery and structure which he employed throughout the Idylls and enabled him to spread his composition of the separate idylls over a long period, thereby showing character development in as natural a manner as possible. For this reason we are introduced to Vivien in 'Balin and Balan', see her as a central figure in 'Merlin and Vivien', and realize that her role in the exposing of Lancelot and Guinevere with the resultant battle in the west is the final stage in an anticipated design.

The role of King Mark is similarly planned, originating in 'Gareth and Lynette' and developing through 'Merlin and Vivien'

to a climax in 'The Last Tournament' when the climactic 'Mark's Way!' is symbolic of the victory of Sense over a Soul enervated and riddled with cynicism. This cyclicity of structure is described in more detail in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

At this stage, however, it is necessary to investigate differences in structural design between the two works, viz. the Morte and the Idylls. As Caxton's form was an attempt to improve the unity of Malory's original (an unsatisfactory attempt, according to Vinaver who compares the Caxton edition with the different structuring of the Winchester manuscript), so Tennyson's conceptual framework of the Idylls is that poet's attempt to bring about a different unity. The Morte Darthur offered Tennyson a wealth of material of uneven quality and of too great a scope for the purposes of a single long poem. Consequently Tennyson was constrained to exclude many of Malory's incidents and, on occasion, develop ideas only touched upon in the Morte Darthur as major themes. At first Tennyson concentrated on the dichotomy of the true and the false, but then gradually progressed to Sense versus Soul and the antithesis of the Actual and the Ideal. It is, therefore, unfair to compare the Idylls with the Morte in order to achieve an order of precedence. Both attempt to do different things and Tennyson's selection from the innumerable incidents of the Morte, his rearrangement of the sequence of his borrowings, and his development of certain ideas borrowed in order to further the overall purposes of his poem, are all techniques he employs in creating an original work on King Arthur and his Table.

Structurally, he retained Malory's first and twenty-first books as the framework of the Idylls but introduced Guinevere (from Book 3) as an important component of his first idyll, 'The Coming of Arthur'. Then, because Gareth exemplified the youthful exuberance of the Order, he brought Malory's seventh book forward as his second idyll.³⁸ Lady Charlotte Guest's translation of the Mabinogion - and perhaps Chrèstien de Troyes' Erec et Enide - supplied material for the next two idylls, the Geraint idylls, which develop the theme of the insidious effects of Guinevere's sin on even the most noble of the knights. They also introduce us to Arthur's doubts about his ability to keep the Order true to its pristine ideals.

Malory's second book, reworked as 'Balin and Balan' gains relevance through the introduction of two of the motifs which recur throughout the Idylls, viz. Guinevere's adultery and Vivien's bestial influence. This proceeds naturally to Malory's fourth book, the account of Merlin's infatuation and ultimate defeat at the hands of Vivien. At this point Tennyson draws on Malory's eighteenth book and relates the story of Lancelot and the lily maid of Astolat. This tale would have been only loosely connected to the preceding idylls had Tennyson not introduced the diamond motif. He made Lancelot withdraw from the diamond jousts, 'love-loyal to the least wish of the Queen' (IE 89) whereas Malory had implied that Lancelot's decision was genuinely the injury he had sustained from his former wounds. By this time Malory's Lancelot had already gone on the Grail quest. In the Idylls, however, the Grail quest follows Lancelot's remorse over Elaine's death, the last couplet

So groaned Sir Lancelot in remorseful pain,
Not knowing he should die a holy man (LE 1417-8),

setting the religious tone which allows for the natural progression to the Grail quest.

Tennyson's next idyll, 'Pelleas and Ettarre' is both a very close borrowing and an original thematic venture. Lines 1-486 follow Malory Book IV very closely, but the remainder of the account is a masterly introduction to 'The Last Tournament' inasmuch as Pelleas becomes so disillusioned that it makes his degeneracy to the Red Knight in the following idyll appear credible. In addition, the downward curve of the Wheel of Fortune is now clearly seen and the music of Arthur's Order fades away.

And each foresaw the dolorous day to be:
And all talk died, as in a grove all song
Beneath the shadow of some bird of prey;
Then a long silence came upon the hall,
And Modred thought, 'The time is hard at hand' (PE 593-7).

For 'The Last Tournament' Tennyson uses both books VIII-X and books XIX-XX which deal with the impeachment of Guinevere and Lancelot. The lassitude of the knights at the tournament, and Tristram's cynical words:

'Nay, but learnt,
The vow that binds 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! (LT 651-5),

give way to the dramatic climax of:

'Mark's way,' said Mark, and clove him through the brain
(LT 748).

The Round Table has collapsed; Guinevere has fled, and Arthur returns from his defeat of the Red Knight to a deserted bower.

At this point Tennyson makes considerable changes to the time sequence in Malory. He has Guinevere flee to Almesbury before Arthur's return from Lancelot's war, and not, as in the Morte Darthur, after Arthur's death. By means of the flash-back technique the poet traces dramatically the last meeting of Lancelot and Guinevere, and also the roles of Vivien and Modred in this scene. But then Guinevere attains a nobility of character and a selfless maturity which causes Arthur's reproaches to sound rather pedantic when he declares:

'Thou hast not made my life so sweet to me,
That I the king should greatly care to live' (G 448-9).

Tennyson displays a tendency to oversimplify certain issues in order to highlight his major themes, as may be seen in his making only a passing mention of Lancelot's wars with Gawain, as it does not suit his purposes to have these wars as the cause of Arthur's last 'battle in the west' (PA 29). What he does consider to be of importance is Arthur's optimistic assertion that 'the whole round earth is every way /Bound by gold chains about the feet of God' (PA 423-4) which he paraphrases seasonally by ending his Idylls: 'And the new sun rose bringing the new year' (PA 469). Malory's final note is not quite as optimistic as (in Book XX, vi) Sir Bedivere finds a hermit praying over a new grave which he realizes is the grave of Arthur as the hermit says that

'...this night, at midnight, here came a number of ladies, and brought hither a dead corpse, and prayed me to bury him' (Malory XXI, vi, p.481).

Malory qualifies this statement by saying that

'some men yet say in many parts of England that king Arthur is not dead, but had by the will of our Lord Jesu in another place. And men say that he shall come again, and he shall win the holy cross. I will not say it shall be so, but rather I will say, here in this world he changed his life (Malory XXI, vii, p.481).³⁹

Tennyson's debt to Malory with regard to the linear narrative is apparent, and his notes regularly acknowledge this debt. His design is far simpler but his internal patterning of language, imagery and symbolism is far more intricate than Malory's. The variety and richness of the earlier work comes primarily from the multiplicity of the incidents narrated and the straightforward, often pithy dialogue. The quality of Tennyson's Idylls lies, rather, in the perfection of its artefacts in conjunction with the thematic comprehensiveness of the overall design.

An example of this is Tennyson's treatment of the story of Merlin and Vivien. Malory's account is very concise, being only part of Chapter 1 of the fourth book:

So after these quests of Sir Gawaine, Sir Tor, and King Pellinore, it fell so that Merlin fell in a dotage on the damsel that king Pellinore brought to court, and she was one of the damsels of the lake, that hight Nimue... so she and Merlin went over the sea unto the land of Benwick ...and always Merlin lay about the lady to have her love, and she was ever passing weary of him, and fain would have been delivered of him, for she was afeard of him because he was a devil's son, and she could not put him away by no means.

And so on a time it happed that Merlin shewed to her in a rock whereas was a great wonder, and wrought by enchantment, that went under a great stone. So by her subtle working, she made Merlin to go under that stone to let her wit of the marvels there, but she wrought so there for him that he came never out for all the craft that he could do. And so she departed and left Merlin (Malory IV, i, pp.75-6)

Even the fact that Tennyson's 'Merlin and Vivien' comprises 972 lines immediately shows that he merely used the Morte Darthur as the nucleus of his own idyll. He reverses their roles, making Vivien the pursuer from the start, not out of love but out of hatred of Arthur's court and values, but his

introduction and conclusion are clearly derived from Malory's account.

A storm was coming, but the winds were still,
 And in the wild woods of Broceliande,
 Before an oak, so hollow, huge and old
 It looked a tower of ivied masonwork,
 At Merlin's feet the wily Vivien lay (MV 1-5).

...
 Then, in one moment, she put forth the charm
 Of woven paces and of waving hands,
 And in the hollow oak he lay as dead,
 And lost to life and use and name and fame (MV 965-8).

Firstly, the tone of these extracts differs greatly from that of Malory, mainly on account of the specific descriptions of the former as opposed to the unembellished narrative of the latter. Secondly, the alliterative thread - 'winds were still/wild woods of Broceliande/ wily Vivien/ woven paces/ waving hands' reinforces the sinister 'wild' appearance of the oak, - repeatedly called a 'hollow oak' and prophetic of Gawain's ultimate 'Hollow, hollow, hollow all delight' (PA 37) as it is Merlin's yielding to the pleasures of the flesh that brings about his downfall.

These two qualities, the tonal and the figurative, reinforce the differences in structural design between the Idylls and the Morte Darthur. Malory invariably proceeds in a businesslike manner, simply stating, for example, 'it fell so that Merlin fell in a dotage on the damsel' and describing the long, futile relationship in an equally concise manner: 'And always Merlin lay about the lady to have her love, and she was ever passing weary of him, and fain would have been delivered of him'. Having said this, he introduces the rock motif, mentions Vivien's 'subtle working' by which she entrapped him there, and concludes: 'And so she departed and left Merlin'.

What is particularly noticeable is the almost complete lack of descriptive words - adjectives and adverbs - in Malory's account. In the section quoted on page 68, and this is typical of the complete 'history', there are only six adjectives and three adverbs and, of these, the only two which imbue the linear narrative with any depth of characterization or emotional content are to be found in the phrases 'passing weary' and 'by her subtle working'. In spite of this apparent thinness of descriptive comment, Malory's style can be felt to be effective and, to a large extent, this success is achieved by the 'subtle working' of an almost imperceptible alliterative process which, together with sustained parataxis, enables him to move quickly from beginning to end of each episode. The variety which maintains the reader's interest is one of content more than of style. Brewer makes a similar statement:

When a reader first comes to Malory's work, besides recognizing it as one mass, he also sees something that may be likened to the forest of pinnacles, spires and towers that rise within the walls of a medieval city. They are all in the one city - but what a bewildering variety! ...They contribute to the variety, the richness, the interest, the pleasure; they are part of the general style and content of the book, as an old building is part of a town, but no one could claim they are part of an organic unity.⁴⁰

Malory has simplified the complicated interweaving of his French sources which would have been foreign to his direct, colloquial approach by dealing in larger sections with the discrete episodes or individuals in a logical manner. What little interweaving there remains is finally more 'a juxtaposition of episodes rather than an interweaving of lines of narrative'.⁴¹

The subtle alliterative quality of the Morte can be felt more than seen in the inner rhythm that characterizes the narrative.

The repeated consonantal (d-, l- and w-) beginnings of words found in contiguous positional and symbolic contact are sprinkled throughout this episode but are not exaggerated or overstressed. So we read that 'Merlin fell in a dotage on the damsel...and always Merlin lay about the lady to have her love', later showing her a rock 'whereas was great wonder and wrought by enchantment, that went under a great stone. So by her subtle working, she made Merlin to go under that stone to let her wit of the marvels there' (Malory VI, i, pp.75-6).

As already mentioned, the paratactic structure is evidenced by the almost complete absence of subordinating conjunctions. Thus we find, repeatedly, sentence and clause openers such as: 'So after the quests...and she was one of the damsels...so she and Merlin went over the sea...And always Merlin lay about the lady...and she was ever passing weary of him...but she wrought so there for him...And so she departed and left Merlin'. In spite of the extreme simplicity of style, the Morte Darthur nevertheless is successful as a sequential chronicle of the 'ethical ideal, the High Order of Knighthood,...as embodied in Arthur and his knights and as grounded in English history, its glory and its fall, on Fortune's wheel, through the procession of time'.⁴²

Perhaps one of the most striking aspects of Malory's style, and one which Tennyson chose to ignore, is his characteristic manner of beginning each chapter. With very few exceptions he has a sentence introducing the main character and placing him in a specific moment or period of time, usually implying a natural flow of events from the previous chapter by using an introductory

'Then', 'and', 'when', 'with that' or some similar word. Tennyson, on the other hand, tends to ignore the concept of time at the beginning of each idyll and concentrate on placing the person described in some sort of tonal or thematic setting which does not carry any time implications but which, nevertheless, suggests a continuity which the remainder of the idyll invariably reinforces either by its cyclic imagery or thematic development or, more usually, by a combination of imagery and theme. So we find that Malory Book Seven, the one dealing with Beaumains, begins:

'When Arthur held his Round Table most fully...Right so
...the goodliest young man'.
came

Tennyson, however, introduces Gareth as follows:

'The last tall son of Iot and Bellicent,
and tallest, Gareth, in a showerful spring
Stared at the spate' (GL 1-3).

Both authors, nevertheless, succeed in conveying the important message that Arthur's Order was flourishing. Malory does this in a direct fashion by saying that 'Arthur held his Round Table most fully', but Tennyson's style is more symbolic and the growth emphasis on 'tall...and tallest', encourages the reader to transfer the known qualities of a 'showerful spring' to both Gareth and the idealism of the Round Table. In other words these initial lines create an atmosphere of youth and enthusiasm which supplies the characteristic tone of the whole idyll, namely a tone of happiness and idealism among the knights who, as Merlin avers,

'...are building still, seeing the city is built
To music, therefore never built at all,
And therefore built for ever' (GL 272-4).

Equally, in syntactical and figurative aspects, Tennyson achieves an originality of treatment in his *Arthuriad*. His

regular balanced syntactical structures reflect exactly the counterpoised design of the whole; this counterpoise often being observed in the lexis of individual sentences,⁴³ e.g.

A storm was coming, but the winds were still (MV 1). The violence of the expected turmoil is shown up in stark relief; the word 'but' not being used paratactically as in Malory. Although this line is an integral part of the seasonal setting, it also creates a tone of negation which is maintained to the end when

...crying, 'I have made his glory mine',
And shrieking out 'O fool!' the harlot leapt
down the forest, and the thicket closed
Behind her, and the forest echoed 'fool' (MV 969-72).

These four lines are onomatopoeic, indicating the shrieking of high winds, and supplying a vivid impression of the force of the wind in the forest: 'and the thicket closed behind her'.

In 1864 Bagehot, when discussing 'Enoch Arden', described Tennyson's style as a prime example of what he called ornate art. He defined this as a 'species of art which aims at giving a delineation of the typical idea in its perfection and its fullness, but ...it wishes to surround the type with the greatest number of circumstances which it will bear'.⁴⁴ He declares further that such art displays a 'want of simplicity. Nothing is described as it is, everything has about it an atmosphere of something else'.⁴⁵ Part of the thrust of this thesis will be to disprove that Tennyson's use of imagery in the Idylls is ornate in the sense Bagehot uses the word, but what cannot be denied is the developed, pictorial style which is typical of Tennyson's approach. This is, in fact, one of the strengths of Tennyson's art and often appears as metaphor or simile. Gareth's angry retort to Merlin: 'Old Master,

reverence thine own beard/ That looks as white as utter truth' (GL 275-6) is not merely a description of the beard but is by implication a credo of personal integrity. Such descriptive, symbolic details would be out of place in Malory's work. So we read that

'...Mark hath tarnished the great name of king,
As Mark would sully the low state of churl ' (GL 418-9).

Malory's references to king Mark are simply factual and the author does not usually comment on motives or emotions. This more straightforward style is exemplified in the reply given by king Mark to king Anguish's messengers: 'Tell him we will pay him no truage, but tell your lord, and he will always have truage of us of Cornwall, bid him send a trusty knight of his land that will fight for his right' (Malory VIII, iv, p.164). This use of simile by Tennyson, and Malory's avoidance of non-narrative details, is perhaps one of the main stylistic differences between the two: the difference between deliberate subjectivity and conscious objectivity. That Tennyson's style and approach is subjective is also pointed out by William Brashear: 'While Idylls of the King has many different facets and levels of significance, at its core it is the most comprehensive vision of a "subjective poet"'.⁴⁶

In conclusion, it is important to note that for Malory, 'history was incarnate in the poem of Arthur, and in Arthur's achievements and knights. Naturally it was real history-writing, a story, not annals'.⁴⁷ History, whether in the form of story or annals, was not Tennyson's chief interest in the Idylls of the King. As he himself said:

'How much of history we have in the story of Arthur is doubtful. Let not my readers press too heavily on details

whether for history or for allegory. Some think that King Arthur may be taken to typify conscience. He is anyhow meant to be a man who spent himself in the cause of honour, duty and self-sacrifice, who felt and aspired with his nobler knights, though with a stronger and a clearer conscience than any of them 'reverencing his conscience as his king'.⁴⁸

If, at times, the Idylls of the King does not have the same terse dramatic realism of Malory's style, with its economic presentation of the essence of character and action mainly through speed, this is understandable as Tennyson's aims were not the same as Malory's. The following chapters will investigate Tennyson's use of imagery, particularly of cyclic imagery, and the structural and thematic aspects of the Idylls, in order to determine the contribution that the Victorian poet made to the Arthurian literary tradition.

CHAPTER TWOCYCLICAL IMAGERY

'...reel back into the beast...' (LT 125)

In 1963 Paull F. Baum wrote: 'If as a whole the Idylls will not bear scrutiny as a story, and if as allegory it shows signs of incoherence and confusion, what remains? The answer must be: many brilliant passages, many splendid descriptions, many fine fragments of narrative'.¹ There are undoubtedly the many brilliant passages, splendid descriptions and fine fragments of narrative but it is my contention that a study of the cyclic imagery contained in these passages will lead one to an assessment of the total poem more favourable than Baum's.

A major feature of Tennyson's use of language is his deliberate blending of literal and figurative meanings, as may be seen in Merlin's reply to Gareth,

'Son, I have seen the good ship sail
Keel upward, and mast downward, in the heavens,
And solid turrets topsy-turvy in air:
And here is truth' (GL 249-52).

These lines are clearly figurative in tone and lead up to the old Seer's description of the enchanted city but Tennyson, in his notes, simply records that the explanation for these lines is 'refraction by mirage' (HT 460). Throughout the Idylls of the King various recurring symbols, motifs and images, by assimilating further connotations, gain symbolic force, and this whole cyclic process creates a powerful underlying structure of imagery which is neither incoherent nor confused. The 'great density and complexity of verbal structure',² which Tennyson achieves in this manner enables him to reconstruct the

ever-varying perspectives of life in his *Arthuriad* and, as Valerie Pitt expresses it, 'the whole set of Idylls then becomes a representation of the growth and destruction of social order'.³ Ryals is in agreement with both Gray and Pitt for he declares that the 'evanescent quality of Arthur's kingdom is suggested first of all by the multiplicity of cyclical images in the Idylls, which serves to emphasize that what comes into being must eventually fade or die'.⁴ It is my opinion that the success or failure of Tennyson's cyclic imagery, linked as it is to structure and theme, is the success or failure of the Idylls as a whole. Most critics of the Idylls during the first three decades of the twentieth century 'complained that the whole, perhaps because of the protracted and intermittent composition, lacks both structural and stylistic unity'.⁵ Fausset's criticism is typical. He declares that 'each new narrative was at first added more by happy chance than by design, until Tennyson, seeing the possibilities of a complete cycle illustrative of his moral theories, inserted the later episodes with considerable constructive unity. The unity, however, of such a cycle could hardly be organic'.⁶ In attacking Tennyson for, as he says, allowing his morality to depress the plot, he is unable to see that there is a pronounced unity of sequence which lies not so much in action or plot as in 'theme, imagery and atmosphere'.⁷ The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate that the cohesiveness and development of cyclic imagery in the Idylls argues that Tennyson was not aided by happy chance but that, at least from the date of the publication of the Idylls in 1859, he planned and composed his individual idylls to express the tapestry of his *Arthuriad* as it was already conceived by him. There is an organic unity in the

Idylls, for 'organic' implies growth and the Idylls grew over a period of over fifty years. This organic unity is one of imagery, structure and theme.

The linking of imagery with structure is particularly noticeable with regard to the structural device of having idylls follow the cycle of the year. This enabled Tennyson to compose the idylls in a non-narrative order, as they occurred to him, and he was able to avoid having to impose 'the structure of the cyclic epic'⁸ which would, perhaps, have resulted in artificiality. Tennyson himself wrote

The Coming of Arthur is on the night of the New Year; when he is wedded 'the world is white with May'; on a summer night the vision of the Holy Grail appears; and the 'Last Tournament' is in the 'yellowing Autumn-tide'.
Guinevere flees thro' the mists of autumn, and Arthur's death takes place at midnight in mid-winter (HT 453).⁹

This synopsis of Arthur's life-cycle, from midwinter to mid-winter, is a cyclical progression which is founded to a large extent on the cyclic imagery of the poem. 'The Coming of Arthur' includes both his birth, cause of 'bitterness and grief' to Ygerne, and a promise of a 'new year' of future optimism.

And that same night, the night of the new year,¹⁰
By reason of the bitterness and grief
That vext his mother, all before his time
Was Arthur born... (CA 208-11).

Conversely, at his death, when his Order had collapsed, 'the new sun rose bringing the new year' (PA 469).

As will be seen in more detail in the following chapters, this seasonal cycle is basic not only to the imagery, but also to the structure and theme of the Idylls. After the night of the new year comes the springtime of the Round Table when Arthur, after 'letting in the sun' (CA 60), decides to marry Guinevere

so that he can have 'power on this dead world to make it live' (CA 93). This symbolic spring culminates in their wedding when 'the sacred altar blossomed white with May' (CA 460); and the literal fusion of sun and earth is the sacramental outward sign of the marriage of Soul and Sense. This sacramental quality of the ceremony is stressed again in the next line: 'The Sun of May descended on their King' (CA 461), and there is no shadow of the climactic disaster which will occur because of the incompatibility of Soul and Sense. In the first three idylls ('The Coming of Arthur', 'Gareth and Lynette' and 'The Marriage of Geraint') the pervading atmosphere is one of optimism and idealism, and the Round Table, like a vital plant, is 'drawing sustenance from the source of life, drawing inspiration from Arthur'.¹¹ Although there are occasional sombre notes, forebodings of the ills that will follow the rumours about the Queen and Lancelot, even 'The Marriage of Geraint' displays a brittle optimism as Geraint rests, 'A prophet certain of my prophecy' (MG 814). His marriage to Enid, significantly the last of the marriages in the Idylls, does not have the same spring-like freshness of description that typifies Arthur's wedding. Whereas the knights 'gazed on all earth's beauty in their Queen' (CA 462), Geraint's love for Enid expresses itself in making 'her beauty vary day by day,/ In crimsons and in purples and in gems' (MG 9-10). This progression from freshness to sophistication is reflected in the change from spring to summer in the symbolic seasonal motif.

The summer idylls, from 'Geraint and Enid' to 'Pelleas and Ettarre' are characterized, again in Elliott's words, by 'a loss of the freshness, beauty, and high idealism which characterized

the spring idylls (p. 24). The Holy Grail appears in summer, after the Round Table has passed the zenith of its influence, and the knights, already corrupt in many ways, are led astray to follow wandering fires:

Then on a summer night it came to pass
 ...down the long beam stole the Holy Grail (HG 179-188).

This is not to say that all references to summer occur in these six idylls, but certainly some of these carry unpleasant connotations, or signify that the freshness of spring has passed even though the present is not completely corrupt. Vivien, in teasing Merlin, calls herself 'a gilded summer fly' (MV 256) and he, not wanting to trace the lines of vice in her face, nevertheless recalls at a later stage that she has given herself this name. The disillusioned Pelleas asks, 'who yells/ Here in the still sweet summer night?' (PE 463-4) and realizes that it is he who is yelling like a wolf for he never loved Ettarre but 'lusted for her' (PE 475).

'The Last Tournament', concluding with Guinevere's flight to Almesbury, is symbolic of the autumnal decline of Round Table idealism, and the cyclical seasonal imagery matches the themes of cynicism and lack of idealism which are prevalent here.

Tennyson introduces this idyll with the words:

Dagonet, the fool, whom Gawain in his mood
 Had made mock-knight of Arthur's Table Round,
 At Camelot, high above the yellowing woods,
 Danced like a withered leaf before the hall (IT 1-4),

and by doing this he stresses the change in season and tone from the 'summer night' of 'Pelleas and Ettarre'. This ended when

...All talk died, as in a grove all song
 Beneath the shadow of some bird of prey (PE 594-5).

Dagonet danced 'like a withered leaf'; a good visual representation of the awkward movements of the gaudily-dressed jester but suggesting, perhaps, that many of the knights were, in fact, withered and no longer in their former 'green' idealism.

'Yellowing' woods 'indicates that this process of degeneration is still taking place; that the Round Table is still in the autumn of its decline and has still to undergo the process of complete disintegration. This autumn imagery gains extra power from the contrasting flashback which Tennyson introduces in lines 10-50. There he relates how the 'young life' departed from the infant, 'Nestling' and how the Queen gave the ruby necklace which was found with her as a tourney-prize in memory of 'this dead innocence'. The subtle interweaving of youth and death sets the 'yellowing' Table Round in sharp relief and lends a note of dramatic irony to the Queen's final words regarding the ultimate victor at the tournament:

'Perchance - who knows? - the purest of thy knights
May win them for the purest of my maids (LT 49-50).

It is at the end of this idyll that Arthur discovers that Guinevere and Lancelot have fled the court. Consequently, the next idyll, 'Guinevere,' commences in the same season of autumn, but there are indications that winter cannot be far off. The imagery continuum makes such a smooth transition from 'The Last Tournament' to 'Guinevere' that it is difficult to believe that there was a difference of thirteen years in the dates of composition of these idylls. The 1871 idyll concludes with Arthur's returning to Camelot 'all in a death-dumb autumn - dripping gloom' (LT 750) and merges, seasonally, with the 1858 picture of Guinevere in a convent at Almesbury where the 'low light' is blurred by the 'creeping mist,' and this 'white mist'

clings to the 'dead earth' (G 1-8).

After Arthur has left Guinevere at the convent the 'mist' imagery becomes more noticeably symbolic and predicts the winter of his fortunes and of his ideals:

...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 (G 596-601).

But the King is no ghost as Guinevere's passionate cry, 'Oh Arthur!' proves. He is 'ideal manhood closed in real man' (To the Queen 38) and not a 'gray king, whose name, a ghost,/ Streams like a cloud, man-shaped, from mountain peak' (To the Queen 39-40) Guinevere's realization that 'we needs must love the highest when we see it' (G 655) leads her to make reparation for her sin,

And so wear out in almsdeed and in prayer
The sombre close of that voluptuous day,
Which wrought the ruin of my lord the King (G 681-3).

The ruin of Arthur's ideals is finalized on

...that day when the great light of heaven
Burned at his lowest in the rolling year (FA 90-1).

Tennyson notes that he is referring here to the winter solstice. Just before the battle he tells Bedivere that he is trying to

'...find or feel a way
Through this blind haze, which ever since I saw
One lying in the dust at Almesbury,
Hath folded in the passes of the world' (PA 75-8).

From this autumn mist, symbolic of the loss of that clarity and vision which was the major characteristic of idealism in 'The Coming of Arthur', and which proves conclusively the humanity of Arthur in his dependence on Guinevere's love and loyalty, the imagery progresses to the 'deathwhite mist' which

envelops the battlefield and, ultimately, 'the stillness of the dead world's winter dawn' (PA 442).

Obviously there is the closest link between this seasonal imagery and the structure and theme of the Idylls, as Ryals succinctly indicates:

One of the basic structural devices of the poem is the cycle of the seasons, by which the poem proceeds from spring in the opening to winter in the final one. This is of course emblematic of the fate of Arthur's kingdom as it moves from vitality and success to the blighting and death of all high hopes which nurtured its beginning.¹²

Buckley agrees:

Each of the parts is given an appropriate seasonal setting so that the colours of the background may accent the prevailing temper of the protagonists in the foreground and symbolize the moral condition of the realm itself.¹³

It is already apparent that Tennyson regularly employs colour imagery as the visual aspect of his cyclical seasonal imagery. So, for example, the marriage altar blossoms 'white with May' (CA 460) and the last tournament takes place when the woods are 'yellowing' (LT 3). Throughout the Idylls colour has symbolic undertones and Tennyson often suggests his themes through a careful interplay of colour and flower imagery. This imagery is cyclic in nature inasmuch as its symbolism accumulates from idyll to idyll. As part of a cyclical system of related motifs an image usually has greater significance than it would have had on its own. Purity is often seen as whiteness or represented by lilies, whereas redness or the rose usually symbolizes passion or guilt. A passage which owes much of its symbolism to direct colour imagery and to imagery which suggests colour by association with such words as 'shadow' and 'morning' is 'Balin and Balan' lines 235-265. There Guinevere, the 'morning'

on her face walks down a 'range of roses'. Lancelot's tormented conscience is evident in that he emerged from the 'shadow' of a doorway but pretended not to see her and 'paced/ The long white walk of lilies toward the bower'. His desperate attempt to regain his purity of soul is felt very strongly in these lines, but when the Queen follows him to the bower his resolution, brought about by his dream of the maiden saint with 'lily in hand...and all the light upon her silver face' cannot stand firm. Guinevere scornfully turns aside his defence of 'stainless maidenhood' which would be marred even by 'as light a flush/ As hardly tints the blossom of the quince', with the hedonistic affirmation:

'Sweeter to me...this garden rose
Deep-hued and many folded'.

Her disregard for 'stainless maidenhood' suggests that Guinevere has already compromised her virtue and is committed to a completely immoral relationship. In this extract we have the complimentary interplay of light and dark, white and red, and flower imagery. This is a significant feature of Tennyson's poetry. When this imagery is viewed as part of a white/red and lily/rose cycle, the full implication of Tennyson's design becomes clear: Guinevere, coming with slow steps 'down that range of roses ...the morning on her face', deliberately chooses the 'deep-hued' garden rose, setting aside the 'spiritual lily' which is the ideal of the Round Table.¹⁴

Although in 'Balin and Balan' the rose is placed in opposition to the lily, these two components of this cyclic image are normally not found together in other idylls. With two exceptions¹⁵ all other references to lily occur in 'Lancelot

and Elaine'.

Elaine, the 'lily Maid' of Astolat, is described in this way no fewer than eleven times and Lancelot's words as she lies dead on her funeral barge are 'Farewell, fair lily' (IE 1385). But the lily is no match for the rose which is found flanking it in the idylls 'Merlin and Vivien' and 'Pelleas and Ettarre', as well as in 'Balin and Balan'.¹⁶ As these are studies of the loss of the ideal the rose imagery is very apt. Vivien, in her attempt to prove that the knights do not live up to the Round Table ideals of purity, insinuates that Sir Sagramore had intercourse with his wife before their marriage by referring to her as a 'rose', thereby suggesting passion and lust:

'O Master, shall we call him overquick
To crop his own sweet rose before the hour? (MV 722-3).

This image recurs when Pelleas, troubled by suspicion, remembers an old tune, 'a worm within the rose' (PE 390). Some twenty-eight lines of rose-imagery follow, culminating in Pelleas' entry into the pavilions of Ettarre's court where he sees that in one, 'red after revel, droned her lurdane knights' (PE 420-1). Throughout the Idylls red is symbolic of upheaval and tragedy. On this occasion it is prophetic for, in the last pavilion, lay Gawain and Ettarre 'with the circlet of the jousts/ Bound on her brow' (PE 425-6).

Foregrounding the lily-rose imagery is the white-red symbolism that runs like a thread through the Idylls.¹⁷ In the two idylls framing 'The Round Table' episodes, the mysterious Lady of the Lake is 'clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful' (CA 284 and PA 199), both when she gives and accepts the sword Excalibur.

Whiteness maintains this aura of mystery throughout the whole work for in 'Gareth and Lynette' the lady Lynette departs from Camelot through 'the weird white gate' (GL 648), and it is the weeding of the 'white horse on the Berkshire hills' (GE 935) that symbolizes the integrity of upright government.

Whiteness also implies uprightness and truth as in 'Balin and Balan' where, ironically, the treacherous Vivien declares that her page's lightest word 'is mere white truth in simple nakedness' (BB 510). Dagonet describes the twelve small damsels, 'white as Innocence' (LT 291), as 'white slips' (LT 295). Vivien, herself a whited sepulchre, calls Guinevere 'Heaven's own white/ Earth-angel' (MV 79-80). This recurrence of 'white' in contexts where whiteness is the antithesis of what is implied, is a reflection of the disparity between appearance and fact in the Idylls: Lancelot's courtly 'wife-worship' (BB 355) is adultery; Vivien's affection for Merlin is treachery; and the quest of the Holy Grail is, for most knights, the pursuit of 'wandering fires' (HG 369).

This dichotomy of imagery is pursued further when whiteness comes to symbolize spiritual sterility - the heathen. Lancelot describes to Elaine how

...at Caerleon had he helped his lord,
When the strong neighings of the wild white Horse
Set every gilded parapet shuddering (LE 296-8).

When King Arthur, in one of the central extracts of the Idylls, foresees the dissolution of his Order, it is the motif of the white horse that comes to his mind. Instead of following their calling, his 'knights that in twelve great battles splashed and dyed/ The strong white Horse in his own heathen blood' (HG 311-12)

will be lost or will lose their identity in a futile pursuit of the illusive spiritual ideal of the Grail quest.

In 'The Last Tournament' whiteness symbolizes both purity and adultery. Tristram's noble wife, Isolt of Brittany - 'Isolt/ of the white hands' (LT 397-8) - cannot keep her husband from Mark's Isolt. At their meeting after the last tournament the Irish Isolt

'Flushed, started, met him at the doors, and there
Belted his body with her white embrace,
Crying aloud, "Not Mark - not Mark, my soul" (LT 510-12).

Although Isolt's embrace is one of passion, the word 'white' is used to describe the excessiveness of her desire for Tristram. The alliterative impact of the expressive 'belted his body' in spite of unfortunate modern connotations would seem to substantiate this interpretation, and the 'white embrace' becomes a very effective image both on account of the unusual connotation of 'white' in this context and because the unbridled expression of desire reflects the 'whiteness' of paganism to which Tennyson repeatedly refers in his 'white Horse' motif.

This cyclicity which gives roundness and completeness of design to the narrative and to the various themes recurs with regard to 'whiteness' in Tennyson's final ordering of the Idylls. In 'Guinevere' the mystic symbolism of 'white samite' (CA 284) is suggested by the 'white mermaid' (G 243) who is seen by the little novice's father on his way to join the Round Table at Lyonesse. Arthur tells Guinevere that Modred is in league with paganism, with 'Lords of the White Horse' (G 571), and eventually it is Bedivere, 'in the white winter of his age' (PA 449) who describes Arthur's passing.

The cyclical treatment of whiteness implying paganism and the forces of evil is in perfect harmony with the lily imagery, symbolic of truth and purity. But another concentric cycle is that of 'redness'. The 'white samite' of the first idyll gives way to the 'red samite' of the 'clear-faced King' (LE 430-1) and the 'crimson samite' (HG 844) covering the Holy Grail. Generally, however, the colour red is symbolic in the Idylls of upheaval and tragedy. This implication does not occur prior to 'Balin and Balan', as the first four idylls exude an atmosphere of optimism, not of tragedy. Then we read that King Pellam's holy spear was 'reputed to be red with sinless blood' (BB 548) and Arthur is, himself, at Badon, 'red as the rising sun with heathen blood' (LE 307). This striking contrast between the blood of Christ and heathen blood defines clearly the spiritual role that the Round Table must play in the war against the flesh, against worldly values. Tennyson then modifies the symbolism when 'red' stands for the decadence which comes to replace the idealism of Arthur's knights. Pelleas finds Ettarre's knights 'red after revel' (PE 421) and, in his bitterness and hatred of Gawain and all Arthur's knights, later calls himself the Red Knight and founds his Round Table of rebellion in the north. Even more pertinently, when Arthur has left to attack the Red Knight, Sir Tristram, winner of the tournament, receives the ruby necklace from Lancelot who asks him:

'...Hast thou won?
 Art thou the purest, brother? See, the hand
 Wherewith thou takest this, is red!' (LT 191-3)

The implication is clear: the red hand is symbolic of lust and the adulterous desire of Tristram for Mark's Isolt, and Tristram is presuming to hold it out for the rubies which came with the

dead innocence, Nestling. Although Tristram denies that the blood is his, Tennyson has associated guilt with the acceptance of the ruby prize. Then 'in the light's last glimmer' (LT 733) Tristram shows Isolt the necklace. She thinks it is the collar of some new Arthurian order but he names it 'the red fruit/
Grown on a magic oak in mid-heaven' (LT 738-9) which he is presenting to her as his 'last/ love offering' (LT 741-2). The irony of these words, so reminiscent of his pagan song: 'Free love - free field - we love but while we may' (LT 275) is immediately confirmed for

Out of the dark...

Behind him rose a shadow and a shriek -

'Mark's way', said Mark, and clove him through the brain
(LT 746-8).

In anticipation of this climax, Tennyson has given an account of Tristram's 'red dream' (LT 486), an apt description as, in lines 406-15, we read that Tristram dreams about a symbolic struggle for the 'ruby chains' between his bride, Isolt, and Mark's Isolt. The passionate Isolt of Britain grasps it so tightly that it seems to impart redness to her hand and the French Isolt cries out:

'Look, her hand is red!

These be no rubies, this is frozen blood'.

Frozen blood implies guilt as Tristram dreams of Mark's Isolt as 'his queen', and his bride declares that her rival's hand is 'hot/ with ill desires'. Tragedy is unavoidable and, in his last use of this image, Tennyson epitomises the influence of adultery on the Round Table in particular and on human society in general. Addressing Guinevere, Arthur says in despair,

'Well is it that no child is born of thee.

The children born of thee are sword and fire,

Red ruin, and the breaking up of laws' (G 421-3).

Earlier, Dagonet shows his appreciation of the impossible task that Arthur has set himself in attempting to wage war on the world of Sense when he defends Arthur's ideals against the cynicism of Tristram:

'Ay, ay, my brother fool, the king of fools!
 Conceits himself as God that he can make
 Figs out of thistles, silk from bristles, milk
 From burning spurge, honey from hornet-combs,
 And men from beasts - Long live the king of fools!' (LT 354-8).

His reference to Arthur's belief in his ability to do the impossible in making men from beasts is part of the cyclic 'beast' imagery which is probably one of the most successful of the many excellent cyclic images in the Idylls. 'Throughout the poem the beast image appears, most often metaphorically, to point up the old medieval and Renaissance view of man divided against himself by divine strivings and a bestial predisposition.'¹⁸ The ascendancy of man's bestial predisposition in pre-Arthurian Britain is clearly stated in 'The Coming of Arthur' where it is symbolized as follows:

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).

The parallel syntax of these last two lines stresses the antithesis of man and beast and initiates a cyclic image of bestiality versus civilization and idealism. These are, throughout the poem, not merely contrasted words as Tennyson continually gives them dramatic impact as well. So, for example, we read that Arthur's knights 'slimed themselves' (LT 470) and left men and women 'on their sodden faces' (LT 473) when they lost all self-control in their attack on the stronghold of the Red Knight.

In 'The Coming of Arthur' the stressing of the theme of bestiality versus civilization is given prominence as this idyll sets out to present Arthur as the civilizing influence in the wasteland of political anarchy which was 'thick with wet woods, and many a beast within' (CA 21). The consistent symbolism of this cyclic image disproves, to my mind, Baum's accusations of incoherence and confusion as typical qualities of the Idylls. In his despair Leodogran seeks Arthur's help, for 'between the man and beast' (CA 60) he cannot continue to exist. A fundamental issue is that, no matter to what degree man is apotheosized, his better nature can remain dominant only if it continues to strive positively against the ever-present temptations of his inherent passions and dormant bestiality. Arthur realizes this when he witnesses the barbaric degeneration of Pelleas. He asks Lancelot,

'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?' (IT 122-5)

The cyclic image of the beast mirrors the circular progression of the Idylls and is in keeping with 'reel' which suggests a reversion and a degradation. It is this same image that reflects Arthur's total disillusionment on the eve of his final battle. In bemoaning God's apparent lack of success in making Himself known through the actions of men,¹⁹ Arthur is forced to admit to himself:

'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' (PA 24-6).

It is possible to trace the coherence of the total series of the Idylls by following the 'beast' imagery through the poem. This artefact encapsulates a dominant motif of Sense versus Soul in the poem. Gareth, on arriving at Arthur's court, is told

by Merlin that unless he can swear such vows as,

...is a shame
 A man should not be bound by, yet the which
 No man can keep (GL 266-8),

he must 'abide/ without, among the cattle of the field' (GL 270). The use of 'cattle' is important as it reaffirms that it is a shame were men not to volunteer for Arthur's vows but it does not imply that such reluctance implies complete bestiality. Indeed, at the inception of the Order the idealistic progression from beast to an almost deified mankind seems relatively easy. This is portrayed graphically on the mighty hall built by Merlin where there were

...four great zones of sculpture, set betwixt
 With many a mystic symbol...
 And in the lowest beasts are slaying men,
 And in the second men are slaying beasts,
 And on the third are warriors, perfect men,
 And on the fourth are men with growing wings (HG 232-7).

The initial ascendancy of the bestial is clearly stated in 'The Coming of Arthur':

And ever and anon the wolf would steal
 The children and devour... (CA 26-7).

Not only is this a physical defeat for man - it is also a spiritual one, for many other babies, suckled by the wolves, 'grew up to wolf-like men,/ Worse than the wolves'.

Gareth succeeds in defeating 'a huge man-beast of boundless savagery' (GL 623) whom he discovers to be no more than a 'blooming boy' (GL 1373). The power of the Round Table is at its height and Prince Geraint has little difficulty in overcoming the proud 'sparrow-hawk', (MG 404) Edyrn. Nevertheless, the victory over bestiality is not absolute. Geraint's unreasonable test of Enid's loyalty brings him, like Edyrn, 'halfway down the slope to Hell' (GE 790) and the outlaws of the land describe

him as a 'beaten hound' (GE 61), while they themselves are depicted as 'wolves' (GE 94).

The following six idylls, from 'Balin and Balan' to 'The Last Tournament' are a dramatic representation of the wavering fortunes in the battle between the human and the bestial, between Soul and Sense. Although the Round Table is dominant throughout, the power of the 'beast' is felt in each pair of idylls flanking the central 'Lancelot and Elaine' - 'The Holy Grail' group. Initially Balin seems to be rescued, by the spiritual influence of Arthur's court, from his 'too fierce manhood' (BB 71) but, once he returns to the demonic woods in order to exorcise his madness after having witnessed the meeting between Lancelot and the Queen, he cannot survive. Arthur's city gives way to Pellam's hall, 'whose nature is advertised by wild towers full of bats and owls'.²⁰ He cannot cope with his disillusionment or with the sophisticated insults of Garlon and Vivien and in Engelberg's words, 'dissolves, as it were, into wild nature' (p.289):

'...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' (BB 478-81).

Animal imagery in the following idyll is concentrated on Vivien, the arch-serpent whose 'talk throughout the idyll is replete with animal images that suggest sexual activity and images of hunting appropriately expressive of her own hunt for Merlin's soul'.²¹ Engelberg has developed this theme in his treatment of the beast image in the Idylls, concluding: 'But in her triumph Vivien is not a gilded summer fly - she is Death itself in the image of the snake again ²²(p.290).

The next two idylls, 'Lancelot and Elaine' and 'The Holy Grail' do not have beast imagery as their leit motif, but bestiality predominates again in 'Pelleas and Ettarre' and 'The Last Tournament'.

One of the knights who seems likely to achieve the goal suggested by Merlin: 'men with growing wings', is Pelleas. In his disillusionment after seeing the perfidy of Gawain he forced to cry out, however,

'I, the poor Pelleas whom she called her fool?
Fool, beast - he, she, or I?...' (PE 465-6).

Engelberg's comment that these lines reflect 'the pattern of self-identification with the beast and the death wish (p.291), seems rather extreme at this stage for Pelleas is still more pathetic in his discouragement than suicidal. It is Percivale's tacit confirmation of Guinevere's guilt²³ that disillusioned Pelleas to such an extent that he sees, as a 'black nest of rats', the hall that Merlin built 'blackening against the dead-green stripes of even' (PE 544 and 543).

We may, at this stage, ask ourselves the question that Tennyson posed in 1886 in 'Locksley Hall Sixty Years After', viz. 'Have we risen from out the beast, then back into the beast again?' (148). Even Dagonet, with bitter irony, calls Arthur 'the King of fools!

'Conceits himself as God that he can make
....Men from beasts ' (LT 354-8).

That he could not is clear from the actions of such knights as Gawain and Tristram. Even Lancelot, whom Arthur trusted 'to the death', (CA 133) proves unequal to this trust.

Tennyson's beast imagery predominates in 'The Last Tournament' in which the prize, a ruby necklace, is found among roots 'like some black coil of carven snakes' (LT 13). Arthur asks the badly hurt peasant, 'what evil beast/ Hath drawn his claws athwart thy face?' (LT 62-3) and, on hearing about the Red Knight, fears that his Order and

'...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' (LT 122-5).

Brutality and lack of knightly virtues distinguish this idyll from all the others. The actions of Arthur's knights who 'slimed themselves' (LT 470); Tristram's insulting behaviour at the tournament; and the inhuman 'shriek' (LT 747) which betrayed Mark's presence and vengeance presage, inevitably, the fall of Arthur's city.

But it is Modred who subtly mirrors the progress of evil in the war between the forces of Sense and Soul. When Lancelot allows the laws of the tournament to be broken, and does not comment or intervene, then Tennyson has us see Modred 'like a vermin in its hole' (LT 165) and, after causing Guinevere to flee the court, he

...like a subtle beast
Lay couchant with his eyes upon the throne (G 10-11).

The malice and the power of the forces of evil are both brought out in these similes but Modred's destructive influence was felt much earlier when, intuitively,²⁴ Guinevere

...half-foresaw that he, the subtle beast,
Would track her guilt until he found, and hers
Would be for evermore a name of scorn (G 58-60).

Guinevere's fear that hers would be a 'name' of scorn is an instance of one of Tennyson's most effective forms of cyclic imagery, viz. his use of names and the naming of people, together with the symbolic implications of the word 'name' as in the phrase 'name and fame' (MV 302).

As 'The Coming of Arthur' is both an introduction to the study of human relationships in the various idylls and an unequivocal affirmation²⁵ of Arthur's values, it was not necessary for Tennyson to introduce the dichotomy of good reputation and loss of name at this early stage. Naming, however, is of considerable importance for establishing a tone of historicity and, even more important, for the introduction of certain individuals who will be of thematic importance in the narrative. Consequently, the first lines of the Idylls of the King are, suitably, the following:

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

Here both the naming and the positioning of the names are significant. Firstly it indicates the importance that Tennyson attaches to names and, by placing Guinevere in this focal position and stressing her uniqueness, he implies that there can be no other wife for Arthur and that her role will be a major one. This implication is realized when, unconsciously repeating 'fairest' as the only accurate description of Guinevere, Arthur muses

'...for saving I be joined
To her that is the fairest under heaven,²⁶
I seem as nothing in the mighty world' (CA 84-6).

In this first idyll there is a wealth of names taken from earlier chronicles²⁷ in order to create this aura of historicity but not to recreate another chronicled Arthuriad, as Tennyson's intention was to present an allegorical or parabolic representation of the war between Sense and Soul.²⁸ But, as he intended using the legendary stories of the Round Table as illustrations, it was important to place them in an authentic setting.

Consequently Arthur

...leading all his knighthood threw the kings
 Carádos, Urien, Cradlemon of Wales,
 Claudias, and Clariance of Northumberland,
 The King Brandagoras of Latangor,
 With Anguisant of Erin, Morganore,
 And Lot of Orkney (CA 110-115).

It is significant that 'name' does not occur in this idyll. A possible reason is that 'name' is usually taken to connote reputation in the Idylls and the dramatic portrayal of personality occurs mainly in the 'Round Table' tableaux and not in the framing idylls.

Beginning with 'Gareth and Lynette', however, the thematic implication of 'name' is continually apparent. Arthur, after enrolling as members of his Order those vanquished kings who were 'bounteous, merciful, / Truth-speaking, brave, good livers' (GL 415-6), refuses to accept King Mark who has 'tarnished the great name of king' (GL 418). Later, Geraint is 'forgetful of his glory and his name' (MG 53) in spite of assuring Earl Yniol that Enid's 'name will remain / Untarnished as before' (MG 500-1). Then, on their eventual return to Arthur's court where Queen Guinevere 'once more embraced her friend, / And clothed her in apparel like the day' (GE 946-7), Geraint is prepared to accept the outward appearance of the Queen's integrity though he

...could never take again
 That comfort from their converse which he took
 Before the Queen's fair name was breathed upon (GE 948-50).

Tennyson's use of this symbol undergoes a subtle transformation in the following idylls where, in accord with the changing seasonal imagery, it carries added implications of proven personal guilt. The 1874 idyll, 'Balin and Balan', included in the series only in 1885, serves as a link between these dichotomous uses of the symbol as found in the Geraint idylls and in 'Merlin and Vivien'. When Garlon torments Balin that Lancelot's 'fair wife-worship cloaks a secret shame' (BB 355), Balin retorts,

'...Lancelot draws
 From homage to the best and purest, might,
 Name, manhood...' (BB 370-2).

The emphasis has begun to shift from misrepresentation, the major theme of the Geraint idylls, to the influence of Sense, on Soul, a far more basic theme of the Idylls but one which appears to be only secondary in the springtime of the Order.

It is in 'Merlin and Vivien' that 'name' imagery comes into sharpest focus. When Vivien hears that a certain charm has power to cause a man to be 'lost to life and use and name and fame' (MV 212), she employs all her wiles to obtain the secret from Merlin. By coupling 'name' with 'fame' Tennyson stresses both integrity and reputation. Merlin's reproach also indicates that usefulness in public office and a good reputation are two matters that are entirely dependent on personal integrity, as the centrality of 'name' in his words shows:

'You seemed that wave about to break upon me
 And sweep me from my hold upon the world,
 My use and name and fame' (MV 300-2).

Merlin describes the insidious nature of the assault of Sense when he says that he 'felt them slowly ebbing, name and fame' (MV 435) and his position as representative of Soul is clearly depicted when with perfect clarity he is able to see Vivien as she really is:

'...Overquick art thou
To catch a loathly plume fallen from the wing
Of that foul bird of rapine whose whole prey
Is man's good name' (MV 724-7).

Here Tennyson achieves great dramatic power by having the cyclic beast imagery coalesce with the symbolism of 'name' in circumstances which leave the outcome of the Soul versus Sense conflict in doubt. But the evil moment has merely been postponed for Merlin, the designer of Arthur's hall, is finally overcome

And in the hollow oak he lay as dead,
And lost to life and use and name and fame (MV 967-8).

Merlin is the spiritual principle of the Idylls but the 'hollowness' of his resistance to the assaults of flesh presages the ultimate destruction of the Round Table. The 'foul bird of rapine', already in evidence in the Geraint idylls, now becomes an evil influence which permeates all the rest until, with the exposing of Lancelot and Guinevere's illicit relationship, Vivien, together with Modred, precipitates the final battle in the west. Most of the 'name' references in 'Lancelot and Elaine' are not part of the cyclic image, but Lancelot's musings after Elaine's funeral give definition to the various symbolic meanings of this image:

'Queen, if I grant the jealousy as of love,
May not your crescent fear for name and fame
Speak, as it waxes, of a love that wanes?
Why did the King dwell on my name to me?

Mine own name shames me, seeming a reproach,
 Lancelot, whom the Lady of the Lake
 Caught from his mother's arms...
 ...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 a part of me: but what use in it?
 ...I needs must break
 These bonds that so defame me' (LE 1388-1410).

Guinevere's growing fear of censure seems to Lancelot to indicate a diminishing love, especially now that he has experienced the totally selfless love of the Maid of Astolat who wanted to serve and follow him 'throughout the world' (LE 934). It is ironic that Lancelot, after having protected Elaine from the 'ear and eye' (LE 937) of the world when she wanted to be his unmarried follower and helper, should hear from Arthur that she

'...might have brought thee, now a lonely man
 Wifeless and heirless, noble issue, sons
 Born to the glory of thy name and fame,
 My knight, the great Sir Lancelot of the Lake' (LE 1359-62).

There is also considerable emphasis in this idyll on naming, i.e. on Lancelot's title. Lancelot tells Laverne to 'hold my name/ Hidden, you ride with Lancelot of the Lake (LE 414-5). Then the jealous Guinevere reproaches him with the words: 'I am quicker of belief/ Than you believe me, Lancelot of the Lake' (LE 1197-8), and Elaine's letter is addressed to 'Most noble lord, Sir Lancelot of the Lake' (LE 1264). That Tennyson intended to point out that Lancelot's name was synonymous with integrity and nobility is evident from Arthur's words: 'My knight, the great Sir Lancelot of the Lake' (LE 1362) and those of Lancelot,

'Why did the King dwell on my name to me?
 Mine own name shames me, seeming a reproach,
 Lancelot, whom the Lady of the Lake
 Caught from his mother's arms' (LE 1391-4).

By making Lancelot the eponymous focal point of this centrally placed idyll²⁹ Tennyson is emphasizing the whole relationship of name and fame.

On account of the spiritual nature of the Quest which is the leit motif of the next idyll, 'The Holy Grail', Tennyson has not concentrated on naming, but has emphasized the corporate unity of his Order and the imminent destruction of this unity. His last request to the knights is to meet together on the field of tournament so that

'...the King,
Before ye leave him for this Quest, may count
The yet-unbroken strength of all his knights,
Rejoicing in that Order which he made' (HG 324-7).

For the remainder of the Idylls the cyclic name imagery stresses the bestial, the evil in man. The final three tableaux prior to 'The Passing of Arthur' are tinged with treachery and despair, as are the references to 'name' which subsume these traits. This bitterness is intense when Lancelot asks Pelleas, 'What name hast thou/ That ridest here so blindly and so hard?' (PE 551-2), and Pelleas answers:

'No name, no name, ...a scourge am I
To lash the treasons of the Table Round.³⁰
...I have many names, ...
I am wrath and shame and hate and evil fame' (PE 553-6).

His words, 'I have many names' are recalled as he states twice, 'I have no sword' (PE 564 and 590). Lancelot's retort on the first occasion was,

'Yea, between thy lips-and sharp;
But here I will disedge it by thy death' (PE 565-6).

Now, when Pelleas addresses these words to the queen, she

Looked hard upon her lover, he on her;
 And each foresaw the dolorous day to be:
 And all talk died, as in a grove all song
 Beneath the shadow of some bird of prey;
 Then a long silence came upon the hall,
 And Modred thought, 'The time is hard at hand' (PE 592-7).

This cyclic 'name' imagery links 'Pelleas and Ettarre' with 'The Last Tournament' as Pelleas, now the Red Knight, maims and mauls a swineherd who calls upon Arthur's 'name as one/ That doest right by gentle and by churl' (LT 73-4). Arthur, while preparing to attack the Red Knight's stronghold in the North, begins to doubt the efficacy of his Order when he realizes that it is his name which has inflamed the wrath of this knight.

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? (LT 120-5).

When he comes into contact with the Red Knight

...Arthur knew the voice; the face
 Wellnigh was helmet-hidden, and the name
 Went wandering somewhere darkling in his mind (LT 454-6).

The parallel between the hidden face and the name that cannot be recalled is deliberate: Tennyson is implying that a name or reputation that is worthy of being remembered does not hide behind a 'helmet-hidden' face.

As in 'Pelleas and Ettarre' and 'Merlin and Vivien', the cyclic images of 'beast' and 'name' are closely linked in 'Guinevere', the only idyll which remains completely eponymous in the final ordering. The Queen

...half-foresaw that he, [Modred] the subtle beast,
 Would track her guilt until he found, and hers
 Would be for evermore a name of scorn (G 58-60).

These lines underscore the irony which readers may discover in Lancelot's words to Guinevere at the beginning of 'Lancelot and Elaine':

'...As to knights,
Them surely can I silence with all ease.
But now my loyal worship is allowed
Of all men: many a bard, without offence,
Has linked our names together in his lay,
Lancelot, the flower of bravery, Guinevere,
The pearl of beauty' (LE 108-14).

Lancelot's duplicity is unworthy of his inherent nobility, and his confidence that he will be able to silence all criticism and dispel all suspicion proves to be unjustified. Guinevere comes to realize this and her prophetic foreboding that her guilt will be uncovered finds final expression in her words:

'The years will roll into the centuries,
And mine will ever be a name of scorn' (G 621-2).

Tennyson's intentions with regard to the cyclicity of this naming imagery in the Idylls may be deduced from Arthur's listing of the main sinners in the undermining of his Order:

'Then came thy shameful sin with Lancelot;
Then came the sin of Tristram and Isolt;
Then others, following these my mightiest knights,
And drawing foul ensample from fair names,
Sinned also' (G 484-8).

Gray notes in this regard:

This ordering of Lancelot followed by Tristram suggests far more was thought out, as far as design was concerned, than Tennyson has ever been credited for. Indeed as 'Guinevere' was composed in 1859 and 'The Last Tournament' in 1871 such framing reference in the earlier written poem suggests the whole design was certain from the outset.³¹

It is clear from the foregoing discussion of the cyclic name imagery in the Idylls that Tennyson was employing names and naming as an important vehicle or symbol for the idea of integrity and the qualities which Arthur wanted to be associated with his Order. The associations and implications of the earlier

references to 'name' enrich the later references and, consequently, stress the climactic collapse of the whole structure of the Order prior to the final battle. For this reason ultimate victory eludes Arthur and the two remaining instances of 'name' usage in the framing 'The Passing of Arthur' are not part of the cyclic image. Bedivere tries to comfort his dying king - and himself - by saying,

'O me, my King, let pass whatever will,
 Elves, and the harmless glamour of the field;
 But in their stead, thy name and glory cling
 To all high places like a golden cloud
 For ever: but as yet thou shalt not pass' (PA 51-5).

This is clearly the end of an historical cycle, but possibly the beginning of a new era. The mysterious queens arrive to take charge of the dying Arthur, one of them calling him 'by his name' (PA 378). From this moment, all names are discarded and Bedivere cries out in despair, 'The whole Round Table is dissolved' (PA 402).

Even the 'Round Table' itself is a most important cyclic image or symbol in the structure of the Idylls and it can be shown that the circumstances in which it is used reflect the varying fortunes in the war between Sense and Soul. Whenever Soul is dominant, or reference is made to times when this dominance was there, Tennyson uses the order 'Table Round' and not 'Round Table'. So we read that Arthur, 'through the puissance of his Table Round ...made a realm and reigned' (CA 17 and 19). At Arthur's marriage Dubric prays:

'Reign ye, and live and love, and make the world
 Other, and may thy Queen be one with thee,
 And all this Order of thy Table Round
 Fulfil the boundless purpose of their king' (CA 471-4).

The qualities which are implied if knights are to 'fulfil the

boundless purpose of their king', become personalized in the youth, Gareth. Because he

...hast wreaked his justice on his foes,
And when reviled, hast answered graciously,
And makest merry when overthrown (GL 1236-8)

Lancelot hails him 'Knight and Prince, and of our Table Round' (GL 1239).

In the final ordering the 1859 Geraint idyll follows the 1872 'Gareth and Lynette'. By stating that the brave Geraint is 'one/ Of that great Order of the Table Round' (MG 2-3) Tennyson implicitly attributes to him the noble qualities so recently noticed in Gareth. This is a typical example of Tennyson's density of poetic structure brought about by his use of cyclic imagery.³² The epithet 'brave' precludes any suggestion of ignoble qualities such as those later found in Gawain and Tristram and justify the placing of this idyll in the springtime of the Order, even though Geraint's suspicion of Enid and his consequent actions are blameworthy.

In defending idealism against the subtle reasoning of Vivien's song, Merlin argues

'Far other was the song that once I heard
...
About the founding of a Table Round,
That was to be, for love of God and men
And noble deeds, the flower of all the world'
(MV 403 and 409-11).

The cyclicity of this image is seen when, in 'Guinevere', Arthur reminds his Queen:

'But I was first of all the kings who drew
The knighthood-errant of this realm and all
The realms together under me, their Head,
In that fair Order of my Table Round,
A glorious company, the flower of men,
To serve as model for the mighty world,
And be the fair beginnings of a time' (G 457-63).

In the original Idylls of 1859 these twin references to 'Table Round' and to the 'flower of all the world' and 'the flower of men' are unexceptional. But positioned in the sixth and eleventh idylls in the final ordering they emphasize the virtues of the Round Table and express Arthur's realization that his ideals have come to nought.

On a more intimate level Arthur, when declaring that he will weed the land of its evils, praises Edyrn for 'weeding all his heart' (GE 905) and announces:

'I, therefore, made him of our Table Round,
Not rashly, but have proved him everyway
One of our noblest, our most valorous,
Sanest and most obedient' (GE 907-10).

Although Guinevere is the representative of Sense when she criticizes Arthur for being

'Rapt in this fancy of his Table Round,
And swearing men to vows impossible' (LE 129-30),

the attacks of Sense are usually on the 'Round Table'. Tennyson almost invariably uses 'Table Round' in either a neutral or a positive way, but the five occurrences of 'Round Table' are all either pessimistic or disruptive. The disillusioned Pelleas asks Percivale, 'Have any of our Round Table held their vows?' (PE 523) and then, as the Red Knight, sends Arthur the message,

'...I
Have founded my Round Table in the North,
And whatsoever his own knights have sworn
My knights have sworn the counter to it' (LT 77-80).

In this same idyll Lancelot admits to himself that 'the glory of our Round Table is no more' (LT 189) and when Tristram refuses to select his Queen of Beauty from among the ladies present the murmur arises, 'The glory of our Round Table is no more' (LT 212).

Finally, the Round Table symbol is mentioned by Sir Bedivere just prior to King Arthur's departure for the isle of Avilion. Bedivere's misery and loneliness find expression in his cry of ultimate despair:

'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' (PA 402-6).³³

A prominent feature of cyclic imagery is that of balance. Just as aspects of an image or symbol balance each other, for example 'Round Table' and 'Table Round', so the differing images give balance to the Idylls as a whole. An example of this is the juxtaposing of 'beast' with 'music' imagery. Such juxtaposing also contrasts Sense and Soul, as the musical harmony which recurs throughout the Idylls betokens 'the faith in which alone a society may prosper'.³⁴

The impact of beast imagery is felt consistently throughout both the chronological ordering of the Idylls and the final narrative arrangement. The image of musical harmony, however, "though it occurs from time to time before 1872, actually becomes a continuing motive only in 'The Last Tournament' and 'Gareth and Lynette'".³⁵ With one reservation, viz. Arthur's words in 'The Holy Grail' when he states that 'God made music' (HG 874) through the prophets who 'could but speak/ His music by the framework and the chord' (HG 874-5), I would agree with this conclusion of Sister Salome. Consequently, it is only in the 1885 ordering that 'music' becomes an image with cyclical implications and an investigation of this cyclicity is relevant in assessing the merits of the Idylls of the King.

Arthur stresses the importance of moving 'to music with thine Order and the King' (BB 74) when he re-admits Balin to the Court. In thus welcoming Balin to the harmonious atmosphere of Round Table chivalry, Arthur is unconsciously echoing Merlin's words to Gareth:

'...but, so thou dread to swear,
 Pass not beneath this gateway, but abide
 Without, among the cattle of the field.
 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' ³⁶ (GL 268-74).

This is not an isolated reference to 'music' but the culmination of a specific pattern in this idyll, for when Gareth and his followers arrive at Arthur's city 'a blast of music pealed' (GL 234) and makes them stop. Gareth then requests the old Seer, Merlin, to restore his friends' peace of mind as they doubt

'...whether there be any city at all,
 Or all a vision: and this music now
 Hath scared them both, but tell thou these the truth'
 (GL 245-7).

A subtle change of tone has taken place. Music, now equated with the supernatural, causes Gareth to search for more than earthly kingship in Arthur's hall. He realizes that there are values present which his experience does not equip him to understand although, unlike his followers, he does not fear the unknown. Merlin's reply points out clearly that Arthur is no mere earthly king:

'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, ³⁷
 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' (GL 254-62).

In 'Gareth and Lynette' all references to music are optimistic in tone but in 'Balin and Balan', a fulcrum idyll regarding the tone and structure of the Idylls, the music imagery begins to reflect the incipient weakening of idealism. Balin makes a promising start in chivalry when he

...bare the crown, and all the knights
 Approved him, and the Queen, and all the world
 Made music, and he felt his being more
 In music with his Order and the King (BB 205-8).

Unfortunately this optimistic mood is of short duration and the weakening of Balin's good intentions is mirrored in the lines:

Thus, after some quick burst of sudden wrath,
 The music in him seemed to change, and grow
 Faint and far-off (BB 212-4).

The wheel of Fortune has begun its decline, and the pristine glory of the Round Table - forecast in 'The Coming of Arthur' and depicted in 'Gareth and Lynette' - has disappeared forever. There is no recurrence of optimistic music in the Idylls. In the next idyll, 'Merlin and Vivien', occurs perhaps the best synopsis in the entire work of the insidious destruction which the illicit relationship of Guinevere and Lancelot will cause. Vivien asserts that she heard Lancelot sing:

It is the little rift within the lute,
 That by and by will make the music mute,
 And ever widening slowly silence all (MV 388-90).

The combination of alliteration and rhyme in these lines focuses attention on the remorseless inevitability of the decline of the idealism of the Round Table.

The music of the prophets and the bards to which Arthur refers in 'The Holy Grail' was both literal and metaphorical.³⁸ It was metaphorical inasmuch as the words spoken or sung by the bards

stimulated emotions in their listeners which made them more receptive to supernatural influences. In like manner the eloquence of Galahad and the veiled appearance of the Grail causes emotional upheaval in the knights who then with a 'sacred madness' try to imitate the prophets but 'follow wandering fires' (HG 873 and 887).

Up to this time music has suggested harmony even though that harmony appears to be threatened. The image cycle now begins to show the obverse as all music images in 'The Last Tournament' are negative ones. Tristram, one of Arthur's leading knights, becomes the epitome of the dissolution of Round Table idealism and he runs 'more counter to the soul thereof' (LT 654) than had he never sworn the vows. This has already been foreseen by Dagonet who refuses to dance to Tristram's roundelay. When Tristram asks him why he will not dance he replies,

'I had liefer twenty years
Skip to the broken music of my brains
Than any broken music thou canst make' (LT 257-9).

Then, when Tristram asks what music he has broken, Dagonet's reply is a reaffirmation of the moral values of the Round Table:

'Arthur, the King's;
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' (LT 262-6).³⁹

This music imagery is as pessimistic as the seasonal and beast imagery of 'The Last Tournament'. Tristram attempts to prove that his, and not Arthur's, is the true music and that free love is the replacer of courtly love:

'Free love - free field - we love but while we may:
The woods are hushed, their music is no more' (LT 275-6).

The central place of music in this idyll, from lines 240 to 359, is proof of the importance Tennyson attached to this cyclic image. Soul and Sense, personified by Dagonet and Tristram, duel on the field of music, with Dagonet deflecting Tristram's jibe that swine, in following the Paynim bard who 'could harp his wife up out of hell' (LT 328), were wiser than he was, by retorting that Tristram 'went harping down/ The black king's highway' (LT 342-3). Tristram does not grasp Dagonet's meaning when the Fool asks, 'Do ye see it? do ye see the star?' (LT 346) but, taking the literal meaning, denies that the star can be seen in open day. Dagonet's reply is a symbolic paraphrase of the idiom that none are so deaf as those who will not hear. He declares:

'...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' (LT 348-51).

This paradoxical 'silent music' is symbolic of idealism which cannot be realized in human terms. But Tristram's sin is that he is not prepared to listen for this celestial music traditionally made by the spheres.⁴⁰ His adultery has blunted his sensibility and made him cynical and incapable of living the vows he made. He taunts Dagonet saying,

'Lo, fool,...ye talk
Fool's treason: is the King thy brother fool?' (LT 351-2).

Dagonet, although he realizes that Arthur's music will prove ineffectual for most, accepts Arthur's idealism wholeheartedly, and can answer:

'Ay, ay, my brother fool, the king of fools!
Conceits himself as God that he can make
...men from beasts - Long live the king of fools!'
(LT 354-8).

The futility of Arthur's music as a practicability in Society is apparent. It is a reality but it is silent and in heaven. Consequently the promise inherent in the sculptures in his hall cannot materialize and Arthur will not succeed in making men from beasts. But with individuals as opposed to society his ideals may reach partial fulfilment. The humble Dagonet 'danced away' (LT 359) down the city, and the novice's father heard 'strange music, and he paused' (G 237) and eventually reached Camelot. The Idylls, nevertheless, ends on a note of hope with sounds of triumph, presumably including music, welcoming Arthur 'returning from his wars' (PA 461).

As Ryals notes, another 'structural device suggesting the evanescent quality of Camelot is the sea imagery' and he adds later that "we find Arthur himself identifying the sea with eternity, thus heightening the significance of the sea's intrusion upon his 'narrow realm'"⁴¹ (PA 140). Tennyson did indeed attach particular importance to the sea, but he did equally to all forms of water, notably sea, deep, wave, rain and mist. At times one or more of these forms predominate. For example, there are altogether ten references to the deep in the three idylls 'The Coming of Arthur', 'Merlin and Vivien', and 'The Passing of Arthur', but only four in the remaining nine. So, too, 'Guinevere' and 'The Passing of Arthur', both set in autumn and winter, contain eleven of the seventeen references to 'mist' in the poem. 'The Holy Grail', the most cosmic of the idylls, has ten of the forty-two references to 'sea', while the two framing idylls have seven of the twenty-one instances of 'water' imagery. Of the nine uses of 'rain', symbolical of growth, six occur in the springtime of the Idylls, before 'Merlin and Vivien'.

In 'The Coming of Arthur', lines 372-376, Bellicent tells King Leodogran how Bleys and Merlin saw a dragon-like ship on the 'dreary deeps'. Then they

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 (CA 377-83).

The primeval elements of fire and water herald Arthur's birth and both, but especially water, remain of great importance throughout his life as may be seen from the cyclicity of this imagery. Arthur's throne is described as doubtful as 'ice on summer seas' (CA 247) and eventually he loses his throne 'among the mountains by the winter sea' (PA 171). It is especially in this last idyll that the sea assumes a menacing aspect. Arthur pursues Modred to 'the phantom circle of a moaning sea' (PA 87) where 'on the waste sand by the waste sea they closed' (PA 92). Ryals declares that 'The sea now begins its steady encroachment upon the land' (p.67) as 'a deathwhite mist slept over sand and sea' (PA 95). The cyclical image is now approaching its climax with friend and foe strangers to each other in the mist. Finally, a dead hush ensues, 'save for some whisper of the seething seas' (PA 121). The alliterative quality of this line gives thematic thrust to the 'hissing' of Garlon and Felleas, and underscores the bitterness of the defeat of Arthur's ideals. All that remains is for Arthur to be taken to the island-valley of Avilion ...'crowned with summer sea' (PA 431) and the cyclical promise of Merlin's 'From the great deep to the great deep he goes' (PA 411) reaches fulfilment.

Tennyson often uses 'deep' as opposed to 'sea' or 'water' to suggest some mystic quality beyond human knowledge but not relating specifically to Christian theological beliefs. Consequently this cyclic image predominates in the framing idylls and in 'Merlin and Vivien' but occurs only twice in 'The Holy Grail'. In 'The Coming of Arthur' as has been noted, the dragonship is seen on the 'dreary deeps' and the baby is carried ashore on the ninth wave, 'gathering half the deep'. Merlin, in reply to Bellicent's questions about Arthur's birth, simply answers,

'Sun, rain and sun! and where is he who knows?
From the great deep to the great deep he goes' (CA 409-10).

Vivien later uses this same image to forecast the destruction of the Round Table - 'to let in the boundless deep' (MV 111) - and in pursuit of this aim she embarks with Merlin, and 'the boat/ Drave with a sudden wave across the deeps' (MV 198-9).

Tennyson counterbalances the forces of evil, represented by Vivien, with the Lady of the Lake who wrought the sword Excalibur 'sitting in the deeps/ upon the hidden bases of the hills' (PA 273-4), as 'she dwells/ Down in a deep' (CA 290-1). Bedivere, carrying Arthur to the lake, hears 'the deep behind him/ And a cry before' (PA 352-3) and rounding off the cyclical aspect of this image is the passing of

...the speck that bare the King,
Down that long water opening on the deep
Somewhere far off' (PA 465-7).

The matrix-image, viz. water, predominates in the first two idylls and in two of the three concluding ones.⁴² From the outset this imagery is deeply symbolical. The Lady of the Lake

is heard as

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 (CA 290-93).

The pagan mysticism of the Lady of the Lake,⁴³ whose voice is heard 'as of the waters', combines with the religious implications of 'to walk the water like our Lord' in forming a total impression of enthusiastic early Christianity with a belief in miracles and a faith in ideals not yet supplanted by the worldly sophistication of 'Pelleas and Ettarre' or 'The Last Tournament'. This dichotomy is again in evidence at Arthur's marriage where there

...past along the hymns
A voice as of the waters, while the two
Swore at the shrine of Christ a deathless love (CA 463-5).

The cyclical undertones of this image reassert themselves in the only reference to water in 'The Holy Grail'. When overtaken by a storm Lancelot decides to embark in the hope that, as he says,

'...I will lose myself,
And in the great sea wash away my sin'⁴⁴ (HG 802-3).

The storm is symbolical of Lancelot's guilt-ridden conscience and represents the nadir of the cyclical cone which from this moment on will rise to the elevated imagery of 'The Passing of Arthur':

'But such a blast, my King, began to blow,
So loud a blast along the shore and sea,
Ye could not hear the waters for the blast,
Though heapt in mounds and ridges all the sea
Drove like a cataract, and all the sand
Swept like a river, and the clouded heavens
Were shaken with the motion and the sound.
And blackening in the sea-foam swayed a boat,
Half-swallowed in it, anchored with a chain' (HG 793-800).

The upheaval of this climactic storm is translated into battle terms as follows:

...with host to host
 Shocks, and the splintering spear, the hard mail hewn,
 Shield-breakings, and the clash of brands, the crash
 Of battleaxes on shattered helms, and shrieks
 After the Christ, of those who falling down,⁴⁵
 Looked up for heaven, and only saw the mist (PA 107-12).

Thematically these two idylls are united by the illicit love of Lancelot and Guinevere which precipitates Modred's rebellion and the eventual collapse of the Round Table. There is a further symbolism which links the two and relates them to the total series, viz. 'mist' imagery. Tennyson uses this both on a sensory level to emphasize the dampness and cold of autumn and winter, and to stress certain underlying themes.

It is the 'silver misty morn/ Rolling her smoke about the royal mount' (GL 186-7) and the occasional spire and turret pricking through the mist that make Gareth remark to Merlin, 'Your city moved so weirdly in the mist' (GL 241). But his integrity is such that he can see the clear light of Arthur and his civilization and is not dismayed, as are his two followers, by the strangeness of Camelot. Guinevere, however, is reduced to awe when the mist which veils Arthur's ways from those who cannot understand them comes between her and her husband at the convent. When he speaks to her his helm is lowered

...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 (G 591-601).

His doom is shrouded in 'mist' imagery which occurs no fewer than seven times in 'The Passing of Arthur'. The cumulative effect of this final cyclic turn of the 'mist' imagery which started in 'Gareth and Lynette' is to shroud the passing of Arthur in a cloud of mystery yet leave the way open for the reestablishment of his ideals. During the battle in the west 'a deathwhite mist slept over sand and sea' (PA 95) symbolizing the clear light of Arthur's ideals being obscured in dimness as 'friend and foe were shadows in the mist' (PA 100). The literal use of 'mist' then gains greater prominence with the 'labouring of the lungs/ In that close mist (PA 115-6) and finally the advent of a bitter wind which 'blew/ The mist aside' (PA 124-5).

Tristram's two Isolts, his two stars, are suggestive of Soul and Sense for he sings, 'and one was water and one star was fire' (LT 730). Ryals comments that 'if this lyric has any relevance at all to the meaning of the poem, we must understand the water as Arthur, or Arthur's ideals, and the fire as illicit passion.⁴⁶ The importance and relevance of water imagery has already been pointed out but something must now be said about the cyclical 'fire' imagery. Not all references to fire may be interpreted as symbolical of illicit passion but there is certainly a thread of thematically similar images throughout the Idylls, and of images which support the cause of Sense against Soul.

It was on a 'night of fire' (MG 634) that Edyrn sacked the home of Yniol, father of the virtuous Enid and, even after Edyrn has reformed, Enid shrinks from him as 'in a hollow land,/ From which old fires have broken men may fear/ Fresh fire and ruin' (GE 820-2). 'Fire' acquires the taint of unlawful sexual desire when Vivien

sings,

'Old monk and nun, ye scorn the world's desire,
Yet in your frosty cells ye feel the fire!
The fire of Heaven is not the flame of Hell' (BB 439-41).

Here the fire which is felt in the frosty cells is sexual desire which, she states, cannot be suppressed by the spiritual fire of heavenly idealism as the flame of Hell will always prove the more powerful of the two.

Another facet of this image is the 'fire of malicious rumour referred to in 'Lancelot and Elaine' where we read that like 'fire in dry stubble a nine-days' wonder flared' (LE 730).

Even the sensuous luxuriance of the fern which seemed to Pelleas that it 'burnt as a living fire of emeralds' (PE 34) causes him to become infatuated with Ettarre and 'lend/ All the young beauty of his own soul to hers' (PE 78-9).

But then, in 'Guinevere', the 'fire' symbolism comes full circle with Arthur's terrible words: 'The children born of thee are sword and fire,/ Red ruin and the breaking up of laws' (G 422-3). The factual 'night of fire' of the Geraint idylls has become the symbolic 'fire' of the destruction of Arthur's civilizing influence. The only hope that remains is that history will repeat itself and that Lyonesse, -

A land of old upheaven from the abyss
By fire, to sink into the abyss again (PA 82-3) -

will one day arise when a new social order creates harmony from chaos.

The apparently simple yet structurally intricate cyclical imagery is in itself sufficient to disprove Baum's judgment that only

discrete brilliant passages, descriptions and fragments of narrative are to be found in the Idylls. The cyclical imagery welds together the total poem to a stylistic unit of great coherence and considerable excellence. Most critics agree that Tennyson's similes and descriptions are excellent, but even Christopher Ricks who calls these 'triumphs within the poem' remarks that it is 'saddening in that they so seldom relate intimately to the poem's real concerns'.⁴⁷ It is not necessary to cite instances of Tennyson's successful use of simile and metaphor; his apt descriptions and his balanced syntactical constructions. For these he is deservedly famous and acclaimed by most critics. But the criticism of T.S.Eliot: '...for narrative Tennyson had no gift at all'⁴⁸ seems to me to be unjustifiably dogmatic and based, perhaps, on some of the more obvious weaknesses in the poem, e.g. the overlong monologue of the young novice in 'Guinevere'. In this monologue Tennyson has the novice, in her ignorance of Guinevere's identity, carry on for too long her criticism of the Queen. The initial irony of the situation soon becomes ridiculous. It is my contention that the excellence of Tennyson's cyclical imagery in the Idylls is a refutation of the criticisms of Baum, Ricks and Eliot. The following chapters of this thesis, those dealing with Structure and Theme, endeavour to prove that Tennyson's use of imagery is but one of the three major unifying aspects of a truly great narrative poem.

CHAPTER THREESTRUCTURE

'...built to music...' (GL 272-3)

Introduction

While even the most virulent of Tennyson's critics can usually find something to praise in the language and imagery of the Idylls of the King, there seemed to be (up to the second half of the 20th century) a curious reticence among even his supporters to defend the structural design of this work. Then in 1949 Priestley defended the Idylls against the attacks of Nicolson, Fausset and the overwhelming majority of early twentieth century Tennyson critics, declaring that the poem represented one of Tennyson's most serious efforts to treat the important problems of his time. He conceded, nevertheless, that the Idylls evidenced one major flaw in that its structure was uneven:

The real deficiency of the Idylls grows out of their piecemeal composition; quite clearly Tennyson's intention, and with it his treatment, passed through three stages, introducing inconsistencies which only complete revision and a larger measure of rewriting of the earlier idylls could have removed.¹

These stages were, according to Priestley, the epic, the idyll, and a genre built on a framework of symbolic allegory. Then he continued:

Nevertheless, the twelve poems do in fact form a pattern, and this pattern is best appreciated by interpreting the whole in terms of Tennyson's last intention, and recognizing that it is not his primary purpose to re-vivify Malory's story in a dramatic narrative, but to use the Arthurian cycle as a medium for the discussion of problems which are both contemporary and perennial (p.240).

In these two important statements Priestley has presented both critics and supporters of the Idylls with substantiation for their theories on the subject. Baum virtually paraphrases Priestley's statement on 'the real deficiency of the Idylls' when he declares:

The poem seems to me to be utterly wanting in unity and coherence of structure - and for this fault I would blame the irregular fashion of its inception and growth and perhaps also some of the friendly critics who encouraged the poet too far - and utterly wanting also in unity and coherence of meaning - and for this I blame Tennyson's weak and unfortunate shift of claiming, or half-claiming and half-denying, a deep, inner 'allegorical' significance!²

On the other hand, Rosenberg seems to be taking Priestley's second statement to its logical conclusion when he ends his study of the Idylls as follows:

The fair necklace³ symbolizes the quintessential matter of Arthurian legend. Deformed by time, retold in fragments by countless minstrels, the myth was at length shaped by Tennyson into the perfect circle of the Idylls.⁴

A more moderate view of the structure of the Idylls is propounded by Kathleen Tillotson in her discussion of the structure of the Idylls:

But Tennyson's large design is unusual in that it grew and took shape partly in sight of his readers. This process may fairly be called serial publication, though of an uncommon kind; extending over forty-three years, with the intervals between instalments varying from seventeen years to one,⁵ the order apparently at random; and the writer's reserve as to his intention supplying a further element of suspense.⁶

An aspect of 'Tennyson's large design' that very few of his readers were familiar with was the poet's practice of composing prose drafts for most of the idylls written after 1859. A study of these proves conclusively that the ordering of the Idylls was not a random one. The prose draft of 'Gareth and Lynette', for example, places the emphasis on marital infidelity and is 'an extension of the tone of the 1870 volume'.⁷ Tennyson

realized, as Hartman further states, that he needed an idyll 'to counterpoise the prevailing decadence of the idylls already written' and, consequently, rejected this prose draft and composed an introduction to the idyll which pulses with the 'living blood' (GL 10) of an untainted Order. By doing this he established the seasonal cycle as a framework of the Idylls and introduced the fresh tone of springtime into the narrative of King Arthur's Table. It was 'in a showerful spring' that Gareth stared at the spate, 'swollen with cold snows' (GL 2 and 9).

The drafts also reveal connections between idylls which are, perhaps, instinctively felt but which are not as obviously sequential in the text of the poem. One such is the incident when

...Lancelot past away among the flowers,
(For then was latter April) and returned
Among the flowers, in May, with Guinevere (CA 449-51).

An innuendo that cannot be proved from the text is that the later adulterous relationship of Guinevere and Lancelot had its origin, albeit innocent, during this ride. The prose draft of Tennyson's introduction to the 'Morte d'Arthur' which he added in preparation for 'The Passing of Arthur' contains this significant observation of the mournful king: 'That sweet smile which Guinevere and Lancelot smiled in the May woods was cruel as many deaths'.⁸ Such an obvious reference to the role to be played by Guinevere in the war between Sense and Soul would have been detrimental to the tone of enthusiastic idealism of the first idyll when 'the sacred altar blossomed white with May' (CA 459), so Tennyson suppressed it in a positive attempt to harmonize the imagery, structure and theme of the Idylls.

Staines points out on page 308 the remarkable degree of textual similarity and structure in the prose drafts and their corresponding idylls and concludes that these drafts were 'obviously meant as the bridge between the poet's reworking of Malory and his final poetic rendering'. Tennyson's originality of approach and his poetic insight may be deduced from the following three extracts. The first is Malory's account of Arthur's displeasure on learning of the vows his knights had taken to go on the Grail quest. Then follows Tennyson's prose version and, compared with it, the relevant extracts from 'The Holy Grail'. Malory's Arthur expresses his natural displeasure at Gawain's impetuous action and prophesies the destruction of the Order. Tennyson's Arthur does far more than this. His words pose the question of man's role on earth and the purpose of the Order. In addition, he stresses the damage that the excessive spirituality of the Quest will do to the social effectiveness of his knights whose lives should be devoted to 'the redressing of human wrong' (p.284).

Malory XIII vii : Anon as king Arthur heard this he was greatly displeased, for he wist well that they might not againsay their avows. Alas! said king Arthur unto Sir Gawaine, ye have nigh slain me with the avow and promise that ye have made. For through you ye have bereft me of the fairest fellowship and the truest of knighthood that ever were seen together in any realm of the world. For when they depart from hence, I am sure they all shall never meet more in this world, for they shall die many in the quest. And so it forethinketh me a little, for I have loved them as well as my life, wherefore it shall grieve me right sore the departition of this fellowship. For I have had an old custom to have them in my fellowship.

Prose draft (Staines p.284)

Ah Gawain, Gawain said the king. Is this vision for thee? but now O Percivale thou and the holy nun, thy sister, have broken up the fair order of my Table Round which I founded for pure life, and the redressing of human wrong. For many among you have taken this vow, who will never see this vision, and many among you will follow wandering fires and be lost in the quagmire, and this same goodly company of knights will never meet again in my hall.

'The Holy Grail' (293-320)

'Ah, Galahad, Galahad', said the king, 'for such As thou art is the vision, not for these. Thy holy nun and thou have seen a sign - Holier is none, my Percivale, than she - A sign to maim this Order which I made. But ye, that follow but the leader's bell ...one hath sung and all the dumb will sing. ...What are ye? ...men With strength and will to right the wronged, of power To lay the sudden heads of violence flat, ... Go, since your vows are sacred, being made: Yet - for ye knows the cries of all my realm Pass through this hall - how often, O my knights, Your places being vacant at my side, This chance of noble deeds will come and go Unchallenged, while ye follow wandering fires Lost in the quagmire.

The importance of the prose drafts in enabling Tennyson to reconsider new ideas in the light of the gradually emerging whole cannot be underrated. Initially, Tennyson's prose draft allowed for the introduction of Vivien before the story of Balin, but eventually this scene was placed in the new introduction to 'Merlin and Vivien'. Hartmann observes that the introduction of four hundred and thirty lines that precedes Gareth's appearance before Arthur, with its allusions to the mystical background of Arthur and his city, 'draw together to be set near the beginning of the Idylls of the King themes that occur in the idylls already written' (page 244) and that will be developed throughout the

poem. Such themes are the conflict of good and evil as seen in Arthur and Mark, and the social objective of the Round Table which is 'shown in the episode of the two widows and serves to depict the healthy state of the society whose sickness was so extensively depicted in the idylls already published' (p.244).

Although it would appear that the prose drafts played an important role in determining Tennyson's final structuring of his poem, it cannot be doubted that the poet's intentions changed during the many years of composing the Idylls and that, consequently, his treatment of his themes varied as well. What is also clear is that at no time did he set out merely to versify Malory's account of Arthur and his knights. Even the 1859 'Idylls of the King' do not comprise four discrete accounts of Arthurian episodes but display a developed and unified theme, viz. the consequences of sin in its effects upon society. The philosophy behind the grouping of the four eponymous idylls, 'Enid', 'Vivien', 'Guinivere' and 'Elaine' becomes apparent when one recalls Tennyson's trial volume of 1857 entitled 'Enid and Nimue' - 'The True and the False'. Although the four 1859 idylls follow Tennyson's earlier portraits: 'The Princess' (1847) and 'Maud' (1855), they 'have a more distinctly imagist structure, which is emphasized at the start with pictures of the eponymous heroines held at some resonant moment'.⁹ This imagist structure places the emphasis unmistakably on individual morality with their common elements and interrelationships arising out of the social problems of Victorian England in the fifties.¹⁰ Their psychological realism is well suited to their pervading ethical emphasis.

There is a distinct shifting of emphasis in the 1869 'Idylls' comprising 'The Coming of Arthur', 'Geraint and Enid', 'Merlin and Vivien', 'Lancelot and Elaine', 'The Holy Grail', 'Pelleas and Ettarre', 'Guinevere', and 'The Passing of Arthur'. In the four new idylls, although all but 'The Holy Grail' are eponymously titled, the stress has moved from individual morality to the state of society. Even the alterations to the titles of 'Enid', 'Vivien', and 'Elaine' demonstrate that human interrelationships have replaced individual morality as the underlying theme. As Charles Tennyson observes:

The new titles given to the four Idylls of 1859 show his desire to get away from any idea that they were mere isolated studies of female characters.¹¹

The three idylls which complete the series were written in the early 1870s¹² and, with the exception of 'Balin and Balan' which appeared only in 1885, were published in the year each was written. All three continue the theme of the consequences of sin in its effects upon society and, structurally, give increased definition and coherence to the preceding idylls. Gareth, for example, epitomizes Arthur's knighthood in the springtime of its idealism and the idyll 'Gareth and Lynette' is therefore placed before the Geraint idylls in which the first suspicions of Guinevere's integrity are rumoured. 'The Last Tournament', on the other hand, depicts the autumn and decline of the Round Table and, consequently, follows 'Pelleas and Ettarre'. It links this idyll with 'Guinevere' by the close structural and thematic contact which it makes with each: Pelleas becomes the Red Knight of 'The Last Tournament' and Arthur's seeing that 'the great Queen's bower was dark' (LT 752) is the logical introduction to 'Queen Guinevere had fled the court' (G 1).

'Balin and Balan', besides performing a similar linking function, reverts to the original 1859 theme of misrepresentation, 'the true and the false' and, as Sister Salome declares,

...connects the ideas and images of the idylls which precede it in the narrative arrangement with those that follow and supplies from a central position greater thematic and symbolic depth and completeness to the Idylls as a whole.¹³

As its appearance in 1885 immediately preceded the final ordering of the Idylls of the King in 1886, it may fairly be concluded that Tennyson wished his poem to be judged not as a serialized Arthuriad, but as a compact parabolic or allegorical work relating to the Victorian society of which he, as Laureate, was a representative member.

He did not, however, want a too rigid allegorical framework to be extracted from his poem which he described as

...the dream of man coming into practical life and ruined by one sin. Birth is a mystery and death is a mystery, and in the midst lies the tableland of life, and its struggles and performances. It is not the history of one man or of one generation but of a whole cycle of generations (HT 443).

Although this indicates clearly that the Idylls was to have allegorical undertones Tennyson stated emphatically:

'They have taken my hobby, and ridden it too hard, and have explained some things too allegorically, although there is an allegorical or perhaps rather a parabolic drift in the poem... 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. 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' (HT 442).¹⁴

His objection to the over-emphasis on the allegorical aspect of the Idylls should not be interpreted as a denial of the

important role played by allegory in the work. In fact, his comment on the 'hardened skins' in which the knight, the Star of Evening, was dressed, viz. 'Allegory of habit' (HT 465), is significant. That he looked upon this allegory as important is revealed in that he repeats that the knight 'trusts the hardened skin' (GL 1111) and observes that Gareth 'lashed in vain against the hardened skin' (GL 1115). He simply did not want

'...to be tied down to say, 'This means that', because the thought within the image is more than any one interpretation... Poetry is like shot-silk with many glancing colours. Every reader must find his own interpretation according to his ability and according to his sympathy with the poet' (HT 442-3).

Perhaps some of the 'inconsistencies' which Priestley, in 1949, remarked on in the Idylls are the result of a 'this-for-that equivalence' which Rosenberg condemns as a too literal interpretation of the symbolism of the poem. "By 'parabolic drift' and 'thought within the image' Tennyson means precisely what we mean by symbol, the antithesis of the reductive, 'this for that equivalence' which his commentators have found in the Idylls".¹⁵ It must, nevertheless, be admitted that there are some minor structural inconsistencies but it remains arguable whether these amount to the 'real deficiency' that Priestley detects. One such structural flaw is the positioning of the following lines in 'The Passing of Arthur':

So all day long the noise of battle rolled
Among the mountains by the winter sea;
Until King Arthur's Table, man by man,
Had fallen in Lyonesse about their lord,
King Arthur (PA 170-4).

Had these lines been inserted after line 92:

On the waste sand by the waste sea they closed,
then lines 93-4:

Nor ever yet had Arthur fought a fight
Like this last, dim, weird battle of the west,

would have followed logically. Furthermore, the continuum of lines 165 to 176 would have flowed more naturally than is now the case:

...then Modred smote his liege
Hard on that helm which many a heathen sword
Had beaten thin; while Arthur at one blow,
Striking the last stroke with Excalibur,
Slew him, and all but slain himself, he fell (PA 165-9).
...Then, because his wound was deep,
The bold Sir Bedivere uplifted him,
And bore him to a chapel nigh the field (PA 174-6).

There is sufficient evidence to prove that Tennyson was most meticulous in revising the Idylls. Consequently, he may well have considered that his poem would have lost more in poetic structure than the narrative improvement would have warranted as a result of this modification.

Had Tennyson been able to compose his Idylls within a time span of, say, five years in the 1870s he may have avoided this type of structural inconsistency, but it seems reasonable to suppose that precisely because he enjoyed, over a period of many years, the advantages of hindsight he was able to create an organic work which, like Arthur's city,

...is built
To music, therefore never built at all,
And therefore built for ever (GL 272-5).

This organic structural growth, which encompassed an ever developing cyclical unity of imagery and theme, followed naturally on his habit of reading nearly every idyll as it was written part by part. Sister Salome continues:

When an idyll was complete, the whole of it would often be read again and again for family and friends. This practice was repeated over the years and continued even after the last idyll was finished. In this way the earlier parts of

the Idylls became so fixed in his mind that when he came to write the later poems Tennyson wrote from a depth of almost conditioned response. The first written idylls thus become the donées of the later ones, and these invariably contain earlier theme motifs and images which they elaborate, extend, and intensify.¹⁶

In this way Tennyson built up the cyclicalness of imagery and theme which is so typical of the Idylls and which, in turn, contributes to its sustained density and unity of structure. Although a chronological reading of the various idylls could provide, as Sister Salome declares, 'a kind of thematic counterpoint to the overt movement of the linear narrative' (p.9), I consider the delicately woven final tapestry of the Idylls to be structurally far superior. There are thematic 'veins' crisscrossing the Idylls of the King which were not always apparent or, sometimes, even existent, in the individual idylls prior to 1886. The role played by king Mark illustrates this point.

In the final published order of 1886 Mark is first mentioned in 'Gareth and Lynette' (published 1872) when Arthur spurns his gift as he is the antithesis of all the noble qualities of Round Table knighthood:

'But Mark hath tarnished the great name of king,
As Mark would sully the low state of churl:
 ...a man of plots,
Crafts, poisonous counsels, wayside ambushings'
(GL 418-9 and 423-4).

Then, in 'Balin and Balan' (published 1885) his name is used as the epitome of wickedness and it is intimated that he will be indirectly instrumental in silencing the music of Arthur's city:

But now the wholesome music of the wood
Was dumb'd by one from out the hall of Mark,
A damsel-errant, warbling, as she rode
The woodland alleys, Vivien, with her squire (BB 430-3).

Next, in the 1859 idyll, 'Merlin and Vivien' but in lines added by Tennyson in 1874, he is portrayed as an implacable enemy of Arthur and his ideals:

...he that always bare in bitter grudge
The slights of Arthur and his Table, Mark
The Cornish King... (MV 6-8).

It is at his insistence that Vivien goes to Camelot to ferret out weaknesses which will - and do - bring about the destruction of Arthur's Order:

Then Mark...
Turned to her: 'Here are snakes within the grass;
And you methinks, O Vivien, save ye fear
The monkish manhood, and the mask of pure
Worn by this court, can stir them till they sting'
(MV 33-6).

Finally, the theme of unknighly behaviour and treachery, which reaches its culmination in the episode of the Red Knight and in Tristram's cynicism, is personified in Mark in 'The Last Tournament' (published 1871):

Behind him rose a shadow and a shriek -
'Mark's way', said Mark and clove him through the brain
(LT 747-8).

Contemporaries of Tennyson, reading the idylls in their published Order, came across Mark only in 1871 and his appearance must have seemed to have little relevance except as a climactic ending to a very diversified idyll. In the final published Order of 1886, however, he is an integral symbol of wickedness and treachery throughout the poem; the antithesis and counterpoise of Arthur, Tennyson's ideal man. Consequently, it appears that Tennyson gained considerably in re-arranging the idylls in spite of Sister Salome's argument that

Each of the units, as a unit, has certain integrating and common factors shared by every idyll within that group. And whether the source of these elements lies in the events

of Victorian history or in Tennyson's method of composition, the fact remains that each idyll has always more in common in theme and theme motif and often in image patterns and characterization than with the poems which adjoin it in the narrative sequence (p.20).

At this stage of the poem Tennyson seems to have felt that his allegory was becoming too constrained within the framework of Soul versus Sense, with Soul symbolizing Victorian purity. A more significant conflict between Mark and Arthur 'suggests an attempt to transmute the parabolic conflict of the Idylls of the King into a struggle between absolute evil and absolute good'.¹⁷

The 'Idylls' prior to 1886

As is to be expected, the separate idylls comprising the 1859, the 1869 and the 1871-4 groups tend to resemble one another in internal structure as well as in patterns of imagery. Each idyll of the 1859 group begins in medias res. Tennyson introduces each tale with a tableau depicting a woman in an unusual situation which needs to be explained. Then a flashback reveals the reasons for her position and, finally, the story is pursued to its conclusion. Each of these idylls has a note of finality in its ending which seems to indicate that Tennyson, in 1859, regarded them as sections of a self-contained unit and not as the first stage in a more ambitious treatment of an Arthurian theme. 'Enid' and 'Guinevere' end on a note of peaceful acceptance: Geraint no longer doubted Enid

But rested in her fēalty, till he crowned
A happy life with a fair death... (GE 966-7)

Guinevere accepted Arthur's reproofs, repented,

...and there, an Abbess, past
To where beyond these voices there is peace (G 691-2).

The ending of Elaine is a clear rounding off of the episode although not the last appearance of Lancelot who groaned

...in remorseful pain,
Not knowing he should die a holy man (LE 1417-8).

'Vivien' ends with Merlin's defeat and Vivien's triumphant

...'I have made his glory mine',
And shrieking out 'O fool!' the harlot leapt
Adown the forest, and the thicket closed
Behind her, and the forest echoed 'fool' (MV 969-72).

It was, perhaps, the eulogistic reaction of the critics to the 1859 Idylls that encouraged Tennyson to continue his Arthurian theme. The group of four idylls added in 1869 can, as Sister Salome affirms, be 'distinguished from that of 1859 by its mythic quality. The earlier stories are marked by a strain of psychological realism; this strain reappears in the 1872-4 group... . These idylls are spun instead from the stuff of legend and history' (p.160). This is certainly true, particularly of 'The Coming of Arthur', 'The Holy Grail', and 'The Passing of Arthur'. These three idylls are at the very heart of Tennyson's *Arthuriad*. As Nancy Engbretsen puts it:

The core of the Idylls of the King is, of course, compounded of 'The Coming of Arthur', 'The Holy Grail', and 'The Passing of Arthur', with the quest at the centre functioning to represent both the highest moment of Arthurian ideality, Galahad's translation, and the inevitable disintegration of that ideality through a chaos of individual pursuits.¹⁸

The finality of close that typified the 1859 group gives way to a more open-ended conclusion in 1869 and one is left with the impression that more is to follow. Even the grim finality of the 1842 'Morte d'Arthur': 'and on the mere the wailing died away' (PA 440), is tempered by Bedivere's faith that 'he comes again' (PA 451) and his final view of

...the speck that bare the King,
Down that long water opening on the deep

Somewhere far off, pass on and on, and go
 From less to less and vanish into light.
 And the new sun rose bringing the new year (PA 465-9).

Possibly the most obvious common structural element of the 1869 idylls is Tennyson's use of what Gray calls the 'frame and internal episode',¹⁹ device. The outer frame (lines 1-146 and 446-518) encloses a central narrative (lines 147-445) which deals with Arthur's birth. Gray points out on pages 17-18 that the frame and the plot have different functions. In 'The Coming of Arthur' the frame makes, relatively, greater use of sources and consists mainly of 'historical' events, facts and actions, 'So far as Arthur succeeds in ordering the realm the idyll's frame is a cycle completed'. Furthermore the kingdom of Arthur exists only within the harmony brought about by marriage and music. The internal plot is more 'parabolic' and 'turns on the question of what is above a man that he should know'. Arthur represents the spiritual aspect of man and 'becomes the most universal of symbols'. The symbolism of the internal episode comes out clearly in three main ways. The first is Merlin's counsel to Arthur regarding the sword Excalibur:

'Take thou and strike! the time to cast away
 Is yet far off' (CA 306-7).

Second is the water and fire imagery of Arthur's coming:

....and all the wave was in a flame:
 ... all round him rose in fire,
 So that the child and he were clothed in fire (CA 381 and 388-9).

Thirdly, Leodogran's dream portrays Arthur as universal symbol when

...the haze
 Descended, and the solid earth became
 As nothing, but the King stood out in heaven,
 Crowned (CA 440-3).

Immediately the 'historical' frame can take over and

...Arthur charged his warrior whom he loved
And honoured most, Sir Lancelot, to ride forth
And bring the Queen (CA 446-8).

There is a dramatic irony in this sudden change from symbol to reality which, in the light of future events, foreshadows the underlying theme of the Idylls, viz. the battle between Soul and Sense.

'The Holy Grail' is structured in a similar manner with Percivale's story forming the central narrative. This is enclosed in the frame of Percivale's remarks to a fellow-monk, Ambrosius. The outer frame comprises lines 1-67 and the single line 916,

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

Here, as in 'The Coming of Arthur' the symbolic centre is enclosed in an outer frame of factual narration.

'Pelleas and Ettarre' maintains a similar external structure but the symbolism does not occur mainly in the internal episode (46-544), which treats Pelleas' infatuation and his disillusionment. The outer frame of Arthur's knighting of the youthful Pelleas with the new knights idealizing of Guinevere (1-45) and the confrontation between the disillusioned Pelleas and Guinevere (545-97) is far more symbolic with the 'bird of prey' image (595) echoing Merlin's reproach to Vivien when he speaks about

'...that foul bird of rapine whose whole prey
Is man's good name' (MV 726-7).

'The Passing of Arthur' is itself part of the framework enclosing the ten idylls comprising 'The Round Table' and, in

internal structure, comprises the internal episode (170-440) depicting the wounded Arthur, and an outer frame (1-169) and (441-469). Although symbolism is not lacking in lines 170-440, the first 169 lines depict the 'white winter' of Arthur's order with final disaster occurring when Modred

...smote his liege
Hard on that helm which many a heathen sword
Had beaten thin (165-7).

But after the 'stillness of the dead world's winter dawn' (PA 442) there is, nevertheless, the promise of a renewal of life for Bedivere thinks he sees

...the speck that bare the King,
Down that long water opening on the deep
Somewhere far off, pass on and on, and go
From less to less and vanish into light.
And the new sun rose bringing the new year (PA 465-9).

Tennyson used this frame and episode device in other idylls too. It occurs in 'The Last Tournament' and elsewhere as well and, having much in common with the flash-back device, may be traced back to the 1859 idylls. Nevertheless, there seems to be a more definite emphasis on this design in the 1869 group than in 1859 or in 1871-4.

When 'The Passing of Arthur' was published in 1869 Tennyson noted: 'This last, the earliest written of the Poems,²⁰ is here connected with the rest in accordance with an earlier project of the author's'.²¹ This dual framing of the series and of the idyll itself seems to indicate that Tennyson had no intention of continuing his Arthuriad after 1869, and Henry Alford's review of the 1869 'Idylls of the King' argues in favour of this interpretation:

We had not four insulated pictures then - we have not eight insulated pictures now. All that we had then,

was a portion of - all that we have now, constitutes - a great connected Poem, dealing with the very highest interests of Man.²²

That Tennyson was not completely satisfied with his Arthurian poem appears from the fact that he composed 'The Last Tournament' in 1871 to exemplify the worldliness of the new breed of knights, and 'Gareth and Lynette' in 1872²³ to counterbalance the pessimism which pervades all the idylls except 'The Coming of Arthur' and the two Geraint idylls. Even then three problems were not yet resolved: (a) structurally, he did not have the traditional number of twelve idylls²⁴ which he had envisaged when starting his Arthurian project in the 1830s; (b) thematically, he needed to link 'Gareth and Lynette' with 'Merlin and Vivien'; and (c) he required some means of introducing the theme of Guinevere's guilt at an earlier stage of the poem.

By dividing the 1869 idyll 'Geraint and Enid' into two parts in 1873²⁵ he obtained eleven idylls, and the publication of 'Balin and Balan' in 1885 gave him his twelfth. 'Balin and Balan' (lines 235-75) indicated Guinevere's unlawful relationship with Lancelot, and the whole idyll, by introducing Vivien who 'lied with ease' (BB 517), leads up convincingly to Broceliande where 'at Merlin's feet the wily Vivien lay' (MV 5).

'Idylls of the King' (1886)

Twenty-four years after he had written that 'the real deficiency of the 'Idylls' grows out of their piecemeal composition ' Priestley made another assessment of the poem:

Superficially a knowledge of the piecemeal publication, and the recognition of obvious differences in treatment among

the idylls, create a presumption that here is merely a loose collection of independent narratives, yoked by the common source of theme in the Arthurian material, but having little organic unity as a single poem. ...In the last twenty years, thanks partly to the perspective time brings, critics have come to recognize what the poem is and it is now receiving full attention as Tennyson's most ambitious, and perhaps greatest, work.

There can be little doubt that the poem has a total structure, and that it is designed.²⁶

The cyclic imagery discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis is in itself an indication that the Idylls is not 'merely a loose collection of independent narratives', but it was the restructuring of the total design in 1886 that made it, to quote Eggers, 'an organic whole with a unified social meaning.'²⁷ In the Idylls, imagery and structure are interdependent and the organic unity of the poem encompasses these two aspects.

The circular design of the poem is mirrored by the seasonal imagery, the structure of the work miming, as Kozicki says,²⁸ the twelve months of the year and weaving this conception into the whole fabric which contains, as it were, the four acts of a play.²⁹ By employing this structural device Tennyson was able to compose the idylls in a non-narrative order and avoided being forced to select too many discrete items from his sources as the narrative now becomes subsidiary to theme. Enid's song about Fortune and her wheel is relevant not only to the Geraint idylls but to the Idylls as a whole. She sings

'Turn, Fortune, turn thy wheel and lower the proud;
Turn thy wild wheel through sunshine, storm, and cloud;
Thy wheel and thee we neither love nor hate' (MG 347-9).

The circularity symbolized by the Wheel of Fortune appears in

the structure of the full circle of the seasons which symbolizes Arthur's life cycle as he was born on 'the night of the new year' (CA 208) and, when he disappeared from Bedivere's sight, 'the new sun rose bringing the new year' (PA 469).

This seasonal progression can be traced quite clearly in the individual idylls. The poem starts in the springtime of Arthur's fortunes, although there is a reference, by means of the flash-back technique often employed by Tennyson, to Arthur's birth in midwinter. This first idyll reflects, within a wide, generalized framework, the optimistic birth and growth of Arthur's ideals. Then, in order to present a specific example of this initial enthusiasm and idealism of the Order, 'Gareth and Lynette' forms part of this first seasonal 'Act'. Of great structural and thematic importance is the fact that this idyll contains no reference to Guinevere. Her infidelity, clearly stated in Malory, is deliberately excluded by Tennyson in this dramatic representation of the springtime of the Round Table.

The imagery and time indications, as has been noted in Chapter Two, are those of spring, eg. 'latter April' (CA 450); 'in May' (CA 451); 'our Sun is mighty in his May' (CA 496); 'in a showerful spring' (GL 2); 'swollen with cold moss' (GL 9); 'thy climbing life' (GL 94); and

...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 (GL 179-83).

But the introduction of the less ingenuous Geraint in the following idylls, and his suspicions of Guinevere, suggest that

even though Arthur's fortunes are at their zenith this is, nevertheless, the time of summer storms. This second 'act', set in summer, is a long one and comprises all the idylls from 'The Marriage of Geraint' to 'Pelleas and Ettarre'. At times Arthur's influence is very marked, as in 'Geraint and Enid':

The blameless King went forth and cast his eyes
 On each of all whom Uther left in charge
 Long since, to guard the justice of the King:
 He looked and found them wanting, and as now
 Men weed the white horse on the Berkshire hills
 To keep him bright and clean as heretofore,
 He rooted out the slothful officer
 Or guilty, which for bribe had winked at wrong,
 And in their chairs set up a stronger race
 With hearts and hands, and sent a thousand men
 To till the wastes, and moving everywhere
 Cleared the dark places and let in the law,
 And broke the bandit holds and cleansed the land
 (GE 931-43).

Geraint's misinterpretation of Enid's words takes place when

...on a summer morn
 ...the new sun
 Beat through the blindless casement of the room (MG 67-71)

and the action takes place not in spring but in summer for Geraint sees 'The lusty mowers labouring dinnerless' (GE 251).

Nevertheless, as the transition from late spring to early summer is depicted in the imagery of these two idylls, the undertone of decline is a limited one, and the main emphasis is on the final victory of Edyrn and Geraint over their weaknesses. The next five idylls of the summer grouping all demonstrate the weaknesses that are now beginning to undermine Arthur's ideals. The grim 'Balin and Balan', like a towering summer thundercloud, heralds the more serious issues of adultery and deceit which will lead to the destruction of the Order. There is sufficient evidence in the idyll to place it at the beginning of summer. When Balin took his place in the hall the joy of the knights

...blazed itself in woodland wealth
Of leaf, and gayest garlandage of flowers (BB 79-80).

Then Balin's relapses into sudden wrath when

The music in him seemed to change, and grow
Faint and far-off (BB 213-4),

are compared with the occasional thinness of the nightingale's song, usually 'full-toned in middle May' (BB 209). Following this comes 'Merlin and Vivien' representing the collapse of spiritual principles. Vivien's description of herself as a 'gilded summer fly' (MV 256) seems most suitable as it is contact with her that will cause the destruction of the Round Table. Tennyson places this idyll firmly in summer as it begins and ends within the duration of a typically swift summer storm. Its first line is: 'A storm was coming, but the winds were still', and when Merlin gives her the charm the storm ends, 'its burst of passion spent' (MV 959).

While the next idyll, 'Lancelot and Elaine' does not develop further the tragic intensity of the previous two idylls, its concentration on the theme of illicit love gives the readers of the Idylls greater insight into the minds of Lancelot and Guinevere. It is set in late summer for we read that Elaine's sad chariot-bier

Past like a shadow through the field, that shone
Full summer... (LE 1133-4),

and that the jealous Guinevere, not realizing that Lancelot wore Elaine's favour only in order to avoid recognition in the lists, flings the proffered jewels 'through the casement standing wide for heat' (LE 1226). Her deliberate choice of an illicit love,

'...this garden rose
Deep-hued and many-folded' (BB 264-5)

which at this stage brings no happiness, is subtly balanced against the renewed spiritual aspirations of Lancelot who, on seeing Elaine, feels that

Then came on him a sort of sacred fear,
For silent, though he greeted her, she stood
Rapt on his face as if it were a God's (LE 352-54).

Thematically, 'The Holy Grail' follows logically on Lancelot's prayer to God to 'send a sudden angel down' (LE 1413) to enable him to break 'those bonds that so defame me' (LE 1410). But, still more relevantly, it shows how even noble spiritual quests may have unfortunate consequences if pursued through wrong motives and at the expense of one's normal duties. It is the quest of the Holy Grail that causes Arthur to ask:

'Was I too dark a prophet when I said
To those who went upon the Holy Quest,
That most of them would follow wandering fires,
Lost in the quagmire? - lost to me and gone,
And left me gazing at a barren board,
And a lean Order - scarce returned a tithe' (HG 885-90).

Once again the seasonal placing of the quest is accurate when
...on a summer night it came to pass,
...down the long beam stole the Holy Grail (HG 179 and 188),
inasmuch as it implies that the period of growth has passed and spiritual decline is inevitable.

The last idyll of the long, hot summer in the Idylls is 'Pelleas and Ettarre'. Although the internal structure of this idyll is relatively uncomplicated its theme warrants comparison of Pelleas' disillusionment and anger with Balin's, and of Ettarre's falsity with Vivien's. Its introduction seems to suggest a parallel with Gareth's arrival at Camelot, for into Arthur's hall at Caerleon passed

Pelleas, and the sweet smell of the fields
Past, and the sunshine came along with him (PE 5-6).

At this stage of the Order, however, there is no tolerance of the ingenuousness of youth, and both Ettarre and Gawain take advantage of the young knight. The hollowness of the outward trappings of Arthur's organization is seen in the superficiality of Pelleas' understanding of his vows. This causes him to become disillusioned when he realizes that Gawain, a knight of long standing, is not true to his word. Tennyson unites the summer imagery with the cyclical imagery of the rose when, after stating that 'hot was the night and silent' (PE 386), he has Pelleas recall a song which he has heard sung before the Queen:

'One rose, a rose to gather by and by,
One rose, a rose, to gather and to wear,
No rose but one - what other rose had I?
One rose, my rose; a rose that will not die, -
He dies who loves it, - if the worm be there' (PE 396-400).

Then, after having seen Gawain and Ettarre sleeping together, Pelleas

...would have wept, but felt his eyes
Harder and drier than a fountain bed
In summer' (PE 496-8).

Finally he falls into a troubled sleep and dreams that

...Gawain fired
The hall of Merlin, and the morning star
Reeled in the smoke, brake into flame, and fell (PE 507-9).

The progress of Gawain's degeneration parallels that of the Round Table and, consequently, also that of the seasons. In 'The Coming of Arthur' he is young and impulsive. We read that Gawain

...breaking into song
Sprang out, and followed by his flying hair
Ran like a colt (CA 319-21).

Then he is a noble knight in 'Gareth and Lynette' who can praise his younger brother and admit,

'Thou hast half prevailed against me' (GL 29).

In 'Lancelot and Elaine' Arthur has to reproach him for forgetting that 'obedience is the courtesy due to kings' (LE 713), but Gawain's superficiality evidences itself for he

...shook his hair, strode off, and buzzed abroad
About the maid of Astolat, and her love (LE 717-8).

He quickly tires of the Quest of the Grail and finds 'a silk pavilion in a field,/ And merry maidens in it' (HG 742-3).

This lack of spirituality coupled with his undisciplined frivolity makes him lie easily in declaring he has killed Pelleas, and he has no qualms of conscience in making love to Ettarre.

The Wheel of Fortune is on its downward course and in Tennyson's structuring of the Idylls summer has passed and autumn has begun. There are only two idylls in which the prevailing seasonal imagery is that of autumn, namely, 'The Last Tournament' and 'Guinevere'. Here the inevitability of the dissolution of the Round Table is stressed. The 'withered leaf' symbol (LT 4 and 242) and the 'faded fields' (LT 53) around Camelot suit the 'autumn thunder' (LT 153) when the jousts begin. The 'wet wind' (LT 137) and 'thick rain' (LT 213), together with the cyclical song element,

The woods are hushed, their music is no more:
The leaf is dead, the yearning past away (LT 276-7),

accentuate the decline of the year. Finally, Tristram's last journey

...through the slowly-mellowing avenues
And solitary passes of the wood (LT 360-1),

is the precursor to the 'death-dumb autumn - dripping gloom' (LT 750) which marks Arthur's return to his Queen's deserted bower.

It is remarkable that 'The Last Tournament', written in 1871, should lead on so naturally to 'Guinevere', written in 1858. Fusing the two are both the narrative line and the autumn imagery. This imagery occurs throughout the latter idyll mainly as cyclic 'mist' imagery which, in turn, links 'Guinevere' with the winter of 'The Passing of Arthur'. This third 'act' in Tennyson's dramatic Arthuriad is characterized by Tennyson's literal and metaphorical use of 'mist'. The atmosphere of decline and negation is created by such phrases as 'creeping mist' (G 5), 'white mist, like a face-cloth to the face' (G 7), and 'wet with the mists' (G 593). Figuratively Tennyson uses this image to symbolize the inevitability of Arthur's defeat and the destruction of his ideals:

...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 (G 596-601).

In the fourth 'act' the mists of autumn become the mists of winter in 'The Passing of Arthur'. The clear light of Arthur and his civilization becomes obscured in dimness, symbolized by the mist-image which recurs seven times in the lines Tennyson added in 1869 by way of introduction to his 1842 'Morte d'Arthur'. Tennyson's consistency of imagery may be deduced from the fact that, apart from a few obviously neutral instances of 'winter' in 'The Holy Grail' and 'The Coming of Arthur', the remaining six occasions of its use are in 'The Passing of Arthur', thereby enabling the structure of the poem to consolidate the theme. But even this emphasis on winter in the final idyll cannot obscure the note of optimism and the promise of future renewal

with which the poem concludes:

And the new sun rose bringing the new year (PA 469).

The Wheel of Fortune, then, as embodied in Tennyson's seasonal structuring of the Idylls, 'correlates well with the cyclic images which give unity to the Idylls as a whole'.³⁰ The circular progression of the Idylls commences with a short exuberant spring, settles to a long summer marked by individual achievements and a falling off from Arthurian idealism, declines in a sudden autumn of despondency, and collapses in the winter of Arthur's defeat, but seems to start to move upward again with the promise of a new order that will re-vivify the world.

In 1949 and in 1973 Priestley affirmed that the Idylls of the King could be compared with a drama:

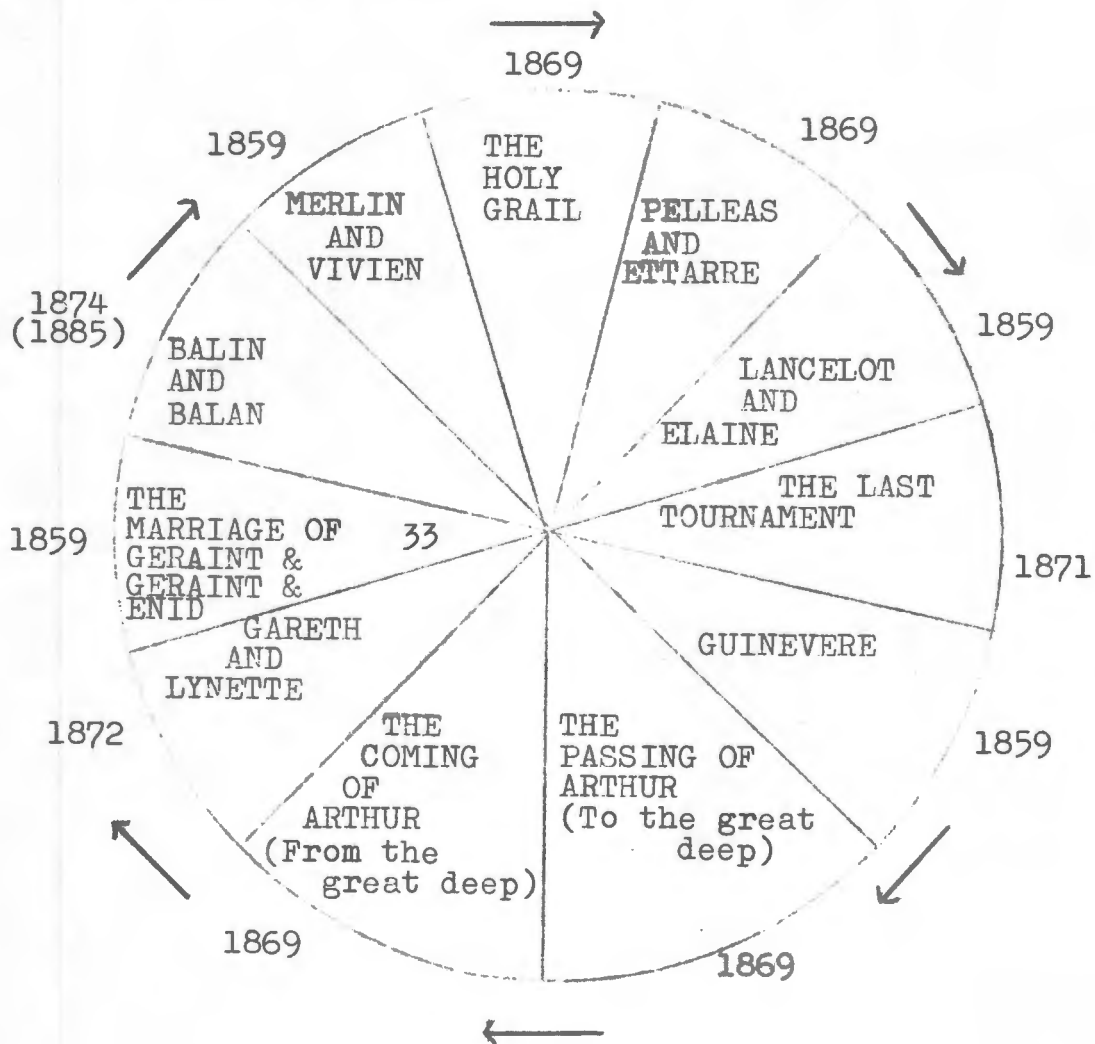
The total structure follows closely the thematic rhythm of drama, and to read the poem as a continuous whole is to be aware of the power of its dramatic pattern, to feel terror and pity, and a final acceptance of tragic loss. It will already be apparent, however, that the twelve part structure is by no means simply ordered. The three-act pattern with four idylls to each act is there indeed, but it is by no means the only pattern. Other rhythms are created by the ironic linkages we have noted, by shifts of tone, of emotional impact, and of tempo. The whole range of choice open to Tennyson through the use of the loosely defined 'Idyll' form allows him to create a dramatic parable of enormous variety, richness, and complexity, while retaining the strong and relatively simple shape of tragedy.³¹

This is undoubtedly so, but a four-act drama is, perhaps, a more accurate comparison. Tennyson's control of a 'parable of enormous variety, richness, and complexity' argues a design, a structure, which it must be possible to trace from a study of the poem. I would agree with Robb that 'the central action is dual with each of the following co-ordinated events being the

analogue of the other:

- (a) the coming of Arthur, and the propounding of the Arthurian wars;
- (b) the marriage of Arthur to Guinevere, and the founding of the Round Table;
- (c) the infidelity of Guinevere and Lancelot to Arthur, and the gradual disintegration of the Round Table...
- (d) the passing of Arthur, and the total dissolution of the Round Table'. 32

There is, however, another structural pattern of analogues which may be traced through the twelveidylls. Tennyson in his Idylls of the King tends to think in terms of thematic antithetical pairs, e.g. 'Sense and Soul', or 'the ideal and the actual'; and another type of structural equilibrium is to be found in the matching pairs of idylls which develop to and from 'The Holy Grail' as their focal point. Graphically, this may be shown as a type of Fortune's Wheel:



It is not suggested that Tennyson consciously organised this antithetical pairing of individual idylls - in fact, the necessity of changing the order of 'The Holy Grail' and 'Lancelot and Elaine' in order to make 'The Holy Grail' the focal idyll of the diagram proves that he did not. Nevertheless, the balance is strikingly in accord with the findings of other critics of the Idylls. Wilson, for example, states

If we see the work as a circle - a round table as it were - in which each part is the same as every other part, then we can see that there is a basic, formal, symbolic, and thematic unity among the parts. For the Idylls as an artistic unit is like a set of variations upon a theme, and although symbolized in different terms, the theme is always the same. It permeates the imagery, characterisation, and narrative of each separate idyll in sets of dualities according to the development of Tennyson's mind: e.g. the actual and the ideal.³⁴

It is generally accepted that the three 1869 idylls, 'The Coming of Arthur', 'The Holy Grail', and 'The Passing of Arthur' form the core of the Idylls of the King. This is reflected by their positioning in the diagram. Furthermore, the framing of the 'Round Table' idylls by the 'Coming' and the 'Passing' is also clearly shown, as is the cyclicity of the series by the 'Passing' meeting up with the first idyll, thereby suggesting that a new order may begin.

Pages 138-144 of this chapter describe the seasonal structuring of the 1886 Idylls, as it is the most obvious continuum of the poem. A glance at the 'Wheel of Fortune' diagram - which maintains the same order apart from the inverting of two idylls that both fall in the summer, or Act Two of the 'drama' - indicates additional links between idylls. 'Gareth and Lynette' counterbalances 'Balin and Balan', the Geraint idylls are set

against 'Lancelot and Elaine', 'Balin and Balan' faces 'The Last Tournament' and the last pair is 'Merlin and Vivien' and 'Guinevere'.

This linking of pairs of idylls according to the diagrammatic scheme seems to be a useful way of looking at the Idylls and argues considerable tightness of structure. Buckley argues that the Idylls is a 'city built to music'³⁵ and traces the following design:

In effect, the ten poems that constitute 'The Round Table' stand as separate panels arranged in orderly progression and framed on the one side by 'The Coming of Arthur' and on the other by 'The Passing of Arthur'. The frame defines the beginning and the end of Arthurian society, and each of the panels marks a stage in its growth or decline. Each of the parts is given an appropriate seasonal setting so that the colors of the background may accent the prevailing temper of the protagonists in the foreground and symbolize the moral condition of the realm itself. The sequence accordingly follows the cycle of the year from the fresh springtime of Arthur's marriage and Gareth's arrival at an uncorrupted Camelot, through a long summer of intense idealisms and hot destructive passions, on to the decadent October of the Last Tournament, the bleak November of Guinevere's repentance and the winter wasteland of Arthur's defeat.³⁶

In spite of this statement he asserts that 'the unity of the sequence lies not in action or plot but in theme, imagery and atmosphere'(p.173). It is my contention that the unity lies not only in action or plot but also in theme, imagery and atmosphere. The deliberate cyclical ordering of the idylls which results, whether by accident or design, in the counterpoise³⁷ illustrated in my 'Fortune's Wheel' diagram is indicative of this unity.

'The Coming of Arthur' and 'The Passing of Arthur'

Even the titles of these idylls suggest a dichotomy or antithesis which should find expression in both theme and structure. Gray's statement regarding Arthur's birth or epiphany may also be applied to Arthur's death, or passing, viz.

...Tennyson uses every literary device of indirection and complication available to him, to make definition impossible, wholly problematic.³⁸

He does this primarily by employing recurrent water imagery, especially the connotation of 'From the great deep to the great deep he goes' (CA 410 and PA 445), and by his use of the antique,³⁹ paratactic narrative style.

The formal structure of both these idylls is very similar. 'The Coming of Arthur' comprises a framework (1-146 and 446-518) around a central narrative (147-445). 'The Passing of Arthur' also has a similar framework (1-169 and 441-469) around a central narrative (170-440). Both are introduced by Tennyson's naming of a minor character and then moving on, by means of the flashback technique, to a description of circumstances leading to the main action of each idyll.

Leodogran, the King of Camiliard,	...the bold Sir Bedivere,
...	...
For many a petty king ere Arthur came	For on their march to westward, Bedivere,
Ruled in this isle... (CA 1-6).	... Heard in his tent the moanings of the King (PA 1-8).

Furthermore, marking the beginning and end of the Idylls, these two effect a unity of design which Tennyson himself described as follows:

Birth is a mystery and death is a mystery, and in the midst lies the tableland of life, and its struggles and performances (HT 443).

Rosenberg, in this connection notes that

...by setting off from the Round Table idylls the paired poems which mark Arthur's coming into a mutable world and passing into another, Tennyson incorporates into the very structure of the Idylls its cyclic themes of change and permanence, of time and eternity.⁴⁰

These cyclic themes all recur in 'The Holy Grail', the third idyll forming the core of Tennyson's Arthuriad, and Arthur's important role as commentator - 'and spake I not tootruely, O my knights?' - is one of the many unifying structural devices that Tennyson uses in his poem. As Engbretsen says,

His mythic or symbolic narrative vehicle enables him to penetrate deeply to the core of human experience. Meanwhile the modernist frame furnishes Tennyson with a mode of rendering his near mythical experimental perceptions more socially available and contemporaneously apropos: it constitutes, in short, an intrinsic hieroglyph, the artificer's oblique way of saying, 'see, our legends still apply'.⁴¹

'The Holy Grail':

The structure of this idyll is an unusual one in the Idylls as it is a first person narration with Percivale as the narrator and Ambrosius as his audience. All the other idylls are told from the point of view of an omniscient narrator. Ryals explains the use of Percivale as narrator as follows: 'the use of Percivale as narrator could serve as a safety device: if questioned the poet could reply...that these are the views of a fictitious person, not mine. Secondly, in using Percivale as narrator Tennyson could involve his audience in the story and have them accept it uncritically by calling on the special merits of the dramatic monologue... By using the first person narrative, therefore, Tennyson was able to escape implausibility and the possibility of offending the readers' religious beliefs.⁴²

Unlike the other idylls, 'The Holy Grail' has no flashbacks except inasmuch as each knight relates the story of his own quest. Consequently there is a clearer unity of sequential progression in this idyll than in the others, with the possible exception of 'The Passing of Arthur'. Tennyson obviously decided on simplicity of structure here in order not to distract attention from the dichotomy of the theme, viz. that a spiritual quest could bring about the spiritual and physical annihilation of Arthur's Order.

'The Holy Grail' performs an important function in the overall scheme of the Idylls. This is to give balance to the cyclicity of imagery, structure and theme which typifies the poem. Even within itself it displays a structural balance and a careful use of imagery which automatically reinforces these qualities in the idylls ranged on either side of it. Its colour imagery illustrates this point. The nun's holiness is implied by her 'utter whiteness' (HG 84) of conscience and her heart 'pure as snow' (HG 97); and 'the pale nun' (HG 129) cherishes a spiritual love for Galahad 'in white armour' (HG 135). For him, 'my knight, my love, my knight of heaven' (HG 157), she cuts off her hair and plaits

A strong sword-belt, and wove with silver thread
And crimson in the belt a strange device,
A crimson grail within a silver beam (HG 153-5).

The close association of red and white imagery is reminiscent of lines 235-275 of 'Balin and Balan' with its 'long white walk of lilies' and 'deep-hued and many-folded' garden rose. The pure 'deathless passion' (HG 163) which led the nun to plait the sword-belt is, however, antithetical to the very human passion of

the Queen in 'Balin and Balan' and Isolt in 'The Last Tournament'; two facing idylls in the cyclical design of the series.

Then, too, as befits an idyll conceptually midway between 'The Coming of Arthur' and 'The Passing of Arthur', 'sea' imagery plays an important role. Lancelot's account of his quest is partly an extended sea metaphor on the theme: 'I will embark and I will lose myself' (HG 802). His description of the physical storm also expresses the emotional storm which racks him for he wants to wash away his sin in the great sea. Seven days he 'drove along the dreary deep' (HG 805) and when he reached the enchanted towers of Carbonek he saw its 'chasm-like portals open to the sea, / And steps that met the breaker!' (HG 812-3). Percivale's description of Carbonek's thousand piers running 'into the great Sea' (HG 503) with 'the floods of heaven drowning the deep' (HG 533) maintains the cyclical 'deep' imagery.

Another distinct motif running through this 'spiritual' idyll is that of insect, animal and beast. This image determines the structure to a large extent and is a unifying force between this idyll and the idylls on either side of it. When the Grail appears in the hall, Arthur is away on a quest against brigands,

To smoke the scandalous hive of those wild bees
That made such honey in his realm (HG 214-5).

On his return he disapproves of the knights' vows to seek the Grail as he knows that their vocation is to put down evil, not to aspire to Galahad's type of spirituality. They are practical Christians,

Knights that in twelve great battles splashed and dyed
The strong White Horse in his own heathen blood (HG 311-2),

but he prophesies that they will 'follow wandering fires/ Lost in the quagmire' (HG 319-20), because 'one hath seen, and all the blind will see' (HG 313). Arthur's words at this time are central to the whole structure and theme of the Idylls. Up to this moment the setbacks, the suspicions, the disloyalties have weakened the Order but its fabric has remained whole. Now a spiritual quest, an ostensibly noble goal, will bring about its fall. Arthur, who does not always show great perception where his own personal relationships are concerned, can see perfectly the imminent collapse of his Order. His predicament is that he must allow his knights to break their vows to him on account of their impetuous vow to follow the Grail. This duality of spiritual purpose is a condition that he is powerless to rectify:

'O my knights,
Your places being vacant at my side,
This chance of noble deeds will come and go
Unchallenged, while ye follow wandering fires
Lost in the quagmire! Many of you, yea most,
Return no more: ye think I show myself
Too dark a prophet: come now, let us meet
The morrow morn once more in one full field
Of gracious pastime, that once more the King,
Before ye leave him for this Quest, may count
The yet-unbroken strength of all his knights,
Rejoicing in that Order which he made' (HG 316-27).

The beast imagery gains force when, after the farewell tournament, the spectators, symbolically, are seated 'on wyvern, lion, dragon, griffin, swan' (HG 350) to see them leave and even the Queen loses all self-control and, beast-like, 'wailed and shrieked aloud' (HG 356). The destructive effects of the quest are revealed when, on their return, the horses stumble

On heaps of ruin, hornless unicorns,
Cracked basilisks, and splintered cockatrices,
And shattered talbots (HG 714-6).

The structural balance of the inanimate animal shapes, at first

beautiful and mysterious but later shattered and worthless, and Arthur's knights, proud that the spectators 'named us each by name' (HG 351) but later 'wasted and worn' (HG 720) is most effective. These splintered symbols of a triumphant kingdom, now become symbolic of a crumbling Order, 'scarce returned a title' (HG 889).

'The Holy Grail' is indeed a watershed in the history of the Round Table. It puts the moral standing of various knights, from Galahad down to Gawain in perspective. Lee points out that 'the virtue indispensable to success in the Grail quest is chastity'. Galahad's virtue is unassailable. The other knights display varying degrees of weakness - 'the redness of the vision varying according to the purity of the knight'.⁴³ The quest brings Lancelot self-realization, the knowledge that his sin is

So strange, of such a kind, that all of pure,
Noble, and knightly in me twined and clung
Round that one sin (HG 770-772).

This image, reminiscent of Vivien's hollow feet 'twined ... together' while she 'clung like a snake' to Merlin (MV 238-40) causes in him a self-disgust that he has betrayed his King and his friend:

'O King, my friend, if friend of thine I be,
Happier are those that welter in their sin,
Swine in the mud, that cannot see for slime' (HG 766-8).

Arthur recognizes the uprightness of Lancelot's desire to rid himself of his sin, whatever that sin may be, and encourages his friend to tend to full flowering the 'root of knighthood and pure nobleness' (HG 882) that is in him. Then, in his closing speech, the king declares that he, like all others,

'...is but as the hind
 To whom a space of land is given to plow.
 Who may not wander from the allotted field
 Before his work be done; but, being done,
 Let visions of the night or of the day
 Come, as they will' (HG 902-7).

Tennyson implies that the acceptance of one's social responsibilities is of primary importance. Anything which militates against this, whether it be sensual desire (e.g. Guinevere's relationship with Lancelot), moral blindness (e.g. Gêraint), or any other manifestation of Sense, is reprehensible. Equally, an exaggerated immersion in spiritual matters to the detriment of one's social responsibilities brings about an imbalance, as happened with King Pellam and, now, with Arthur's knights. 'Love and duty - these are the basic principles of man's life; and all which tends to pervert or obscure these principles should, Tennyson implies in 'The Holy Grail', be condemned as harmful and pernicious'.⁴⁴

'Gareth and Lynette' and 'Pelleas and Ettarre':

Here the theme of youthful idealism forms a common core, but the antithesis appears in the varying responses of Gareth and Pelleas to difficult situations. Structurally the theme is carried by what Robb calls 'the narrative images of the youthful hero, the damsel errant, and the unhorsing of the hero by Lancelot'.⁴⁵ 'Pelleas and Ettarre', in fact, as Rosenberg points out,⁴⁶ tells a similar story to 'Gareth and Lynette' but in reverse. Tennyson's choice of words to create tone is worthy of mention. Gareth, the one who ultimately remains loyal to his vows, is the 'tallest' of the tall sons, and is discovered staring at the 'spate'; indicative of power, impetus and strength. Pelleas, on the other hand, opens the doors 'softly' an adverb

quite out of keeping with the manliness implicit in knighthood. By its use Tennyson is, deliberately, drawing attention to a lack of strength in Pelleas which will eventually cause him to lose all sense of balance and become the vicious Red Knight. Reinforcing this 'softly' is the stress Tennyson lays on his 'youth' and his bringing with him the 'sweet smell of the fields'. It is no wonder that Pelleas becomes infatuated with Ettarre and does not have sufficient strength of character to combat the false Geraint's treachery.

Within the first six lines of each idyll we are introduced to Gareth and Pelleas:

The last tall son of Lot
and Bellicent
And tallest, Gareth, in
a showerful spring
Stared at the spate
(GL 1-3).

In hall at old Caerleon, the
high doors
Were softly sundered, and through
these a youth,
Pelleas, and the sweet smell of
the fields
Past, and the sunshine came
along with him
(PE 3-6).

Both 'damsels errant' are beautiful and wilful, but there the resemblance ends for Lynette possesses some spiritual integrity which is completely lacking in the worldly Ettarre. Even though Lynette is petulant and wilful Tennyson, by describing her beauty sympathetically and, in the last line of the idyll, by insinuating that Gareth marries her, allows her to appear in a favourable light.

The structural relationship between the two idylls appears most clearly in the incidents involving the unhorsing of the two young men by Lancelot. One touch of Lancelot's skilled spear

is sufficient to unhorse Gareth who laughs when he strikes the ground. He explains his laughter to Lynette, saying that it is ironic that

'I, the son
Of old King Lot and good Queen Bellicent,
And victor of the bridges and the ford,
And knight of Arthur, here lie thrown by whom
I know not' (GL 1199-1203).

Pelleas meets Lancelot after having left Arthur's 'black nest of rats' (PE 554) and his unhorsing is devoid of either dignity or humour:

The weary steed of Pelleas floundering flung
His rider, who called out from the dark field,
'Thou art false as Hell: slay me: I have no sword'.
...
And Lancelot, with his heel upon the fallen,
Rolling his eyes, a moment stood, then spake:
'Rise, weakling, I am Lancelot; say thy say' (PE 562-70).

Once again Tennyson's use of colour symbolism is important in the structure of these idylls. Gareth falls onto grass (i.e. green) implying vitality and positive values. Pelleas calls out from the 'dark field' (i.e. black) implying a bitterness that will lead to the bestiality of the Red Knight. Furthermore, Lancelot's assessment of Pelleas - 'Rise, weakling' - contrasts strikingly with his words to Gareth,

'Blessèd be thou, Sir Gareth! knight art thou
To the King's best wish' (GL 1226-7).

There is clearly a structural parallel between these two idylls which argues Gareth's being the personification of Arthur's ideal but Pelleas that of 'red ruin, and the breaking up of laws' (G 423). In this regard Robb states:

Gareth models himself upon Arthur, imitates him, but also in that he is a type of Arthur from the structural point of view, he reveals certain aspects of Arthur (p.275).

Initially Pelleas's decisions are guided by the requirements of his vows:

'What! slay a sleeping knight? the King hath bound
And sworn me to this brotherhood' (PE 439-40).

In the end, however, he serves as an example of Tristram's cynical observation:

'The vow that binds too strictly snaps itself -
...ay, being snapt -
We run more counter to the soul thereof
Than had we never sworn' (LT 652-5).

Tennyson's technique, though, is becoming more complex: he is stressing more and more 'the inner conflicts of his characters by a series of half-real events on the literal plane'.⁴⁷ This shows his mastery of his narrative line as 'Gareth and Lynette' was written three years after 'Pelleas and Ettarre'.

The Geraint idylls and 'Lancelot and Elaine'

These 1859 idylls evidence considerable similarity in structure and theme and, consequently, balance each other at opposite sides of the cyclical movement of the Idylls. Thematically, they are alike inasmuch as the eponymous heroines display irreproachable character traits and the love of both is so upright that Geraint and Lancelot seem to lack integrity. Geraint's easy acceptance of circumstantial evidence shows an inherent weakness in him, while Lancelot's unlawful love of the Queen prevents his loving the virtuous Elaine:

The shackles of an old love straitened him,
His honour rooted in dishonour stood,
And faith unfaithful kept him falsely true (LE 870-2).

Both reflect a treatment of time which is common in the Idylls. The Geraint idylls open in medias res with the marriage being threatened; then the second action goes back to the events prior

to the marriage, and the third reverts to the immediate situation. In 'Lancelot and Elaine' the first thirty-three lines introduce Elaine with Lancelot's shield; then in a flashback, lines 34-981, the main story of Lancelot's wound is told, and then lines 982-1418 revert to Elaine, her tragic death, and Lancelot's remorse, 'not knowing he should die a holy man' (LE 1418).

Even the cyclic imagery of the 'white horse' which recurs in both idylls underscores the basic theme of purification, of weeding the garden of the soul. As Arthur weeded out the slothful and the guilty, as 'men weed the White Horse on the Berkshire Hills' (GE 935), so Geraint eventually weeds out suspicion from his heart, 'nor did he doubt her more,/ But rested in her fealty' (GE 965-6). Lancelot helped Arthur 'when the strong neighings of the wild White Horse' (LE 297) caused Caerleon to shudder, and Elaine's death causes him to repent his sin.

A major structural device common to these idylls is Tennyson's use of song to reinforce the seasonal development of the poem. The songs of Enid and Elaine differ considerably in tone. Enid sings with a bird's 'sweet voice' (MG 329) of Fortune and her wheel, and her song is both optimistic and resigned:

'Turn, Fortune, turn thy wheel with smile or frown;
With that wild wheel we go not up or down;
Our hoard is little, but our hearts are great' (MG 350-2).

For Elaine, the Wheel of Fortune has begun its downward journey and she sings:

'Love, art thou sweet? then bitter death must be
Love, thou art bitter; sweet is death to me.
O Love, if death be sweeter, let me die' (LE 1003-5).

Then, "the blood-red light of dawn/ Flared on her face, she shrilling, 'Let me die!'" (LE 1018-9).

Both the Geraint idylls and 'Lancelot and Elaine' appear to come full circle: 'Geraint passes from grace through a form of spiritual madness to redemption',⁴⁸ Lancelot passes from deceit,⁴⁹ through suffering, to remorse.

'Balin and Balan' and 'The Last Tournament'

These two idylls are structurally very important as they round off many implied themes, and it is significant that they face each other in the cyclical progression of the idylls. Both are idylls of the 1870s and, as such, can be expected to incorporate much of Tennyson's mature thought. After a comparison of the two I shall analyse the internal structure of each.

Firstly, the defiance of Balin and the Red Knight brings them into conflict with Arthur. Coming when the wheel of fortune is still in the ascendant, the meeting with Balin does not present Arthur with any problem:

And Arthur lightly smote the brethren down,
And lightly so returned, and no man knew (BB 39-40).

The defiance of the Red Knight, however, is vicious and inspired by a hatred of Arthur's ideals. The knights are also decadent and, although he easily overcomes the Red Knight, Arthur cannot control his followers who

...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...

...
And all the pavement streamed with massacre (LT 468-76).

This reaction of the knights is in direct contrast to their earlier, pre-Grail attitude to the vanquished Balin:

So Balin bare the crown, and all the knights
Approved him, and the Queen, and all the world
Made music (BB 205-7).

Another striking structural similarity is that each of the two idylls has an Order set up in defiance of Arthur's own: those of Pellam and the Red Knight. These two orders represent excessive spirituality and excessive sensuality - a dichotomy equally distasteful to Tennyson and opposed to the social consciousness of Arthur who 'must guard/ That which he rules' (HG 901-2). Arthur hears that Pellam

'...seeing that thy realm
Hath prospered in the name of Christ, the King
Took, as in rival heat, to holy things' (BB 95-7).

Later he receives the Red Knight's message:

'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' (LT 77-80).

Once again the cyclic structure of the Idylls is evidenced by the antithesis of the false spirituality of Pellam's court and the extreme bestiality of the Red Knight's Order. By implication Arthur's Order is a balanced ideal but it is an ideal which will be affected by these two extremes.

A third notable common feature of these idylls is the attitude they reveal towards the inviolability of vows. 'Balin and Balan', although composed in 1874, leads up to 'The Holy Grail' in the final order and so the importance of keeping one's vows is not disputed. Gray remarks that 'The idyll opens with defection. By not providing tribute Pellam has broken his vow.

To Arthur, living one's vows is the only reality as "man's word is God in Man".⁵⁰ Even Balin the 'Savage' blames himself for having shamed the crown on his shield. After the unsettling influence of the Grail Quest, however, even knights like Tristram become bestial. In her anger Isolt accuses him of having 'grown wild beast thyself' (LT 632), and reminds him of the power that 'was once in vows when men believed their King' (LT 644).

Tristram's bitter retort is,

'Vows! did you keep the vow you made to Mark
More than I mine? Lied, say ye? Nay, but learnt,
The vow that binds too strictly snaps itself' (LT 650-2).

By breaking his vows Tristram has broken Arthur's music. Boyd Litzinger declares: 'Tristram, the duly knighted hero, is in reality a false knight, for he has made a mockery of the vows to Arthur and to God. Dagonet says to him,

"when thou playest that air with Queen Isolt,
Thou makest broken music with thy bride,
Her daintier namesake...
And so thou breakest Arthur's music, too" (LT 263-6).⁵¹

Balin, by keeping his, feels his being move 'in music with his Order and the King' (BB 208). In this way Tennyson employs 'music' imagery to heighten the contrast of these two idylls.

The Structure of 'Balin and Balan'

Very little of the story of 'Balin and Balan' is taken from the Morte Darthur as Tennyson composed this idyll primarily to introduce 'Merlin and Vivien' and to effect the unification of certain themes in the Idylls. The two episodes which especially illustrate these arguments are Balin's meeting with Vivien after his being an unwilling witness to a meeting between Lancelot and Guinevere. So important are these two incidents to the narrative thread of the whole series that it seems likely that

Tennyson composed 'Balin and Balan' partly in order to have a suitable vehicle for introducing them.

Central to the theme of the idyll and centrally placed structurally is the garden scene in which 'the deep-hued and many folded' rose becomes a fitting emblem of the voluptuous, passionate Queen (235-84). Rosenberg's observation in this regard is very apt:

The garden scene works perfectly within the narrative of 'Balin and Balan' at the same time that it takes us back, through Guinevere's reminiscence, to the time before the founding of the Round Table and forward to 'Lancelot and Elaine'. The score opens out to become the entire setting of the later idyll, in which Lancelot must again walk the same divided path and choose between the rose of Guinevere and the lily maid of Astolat.

In the light of such subtle architectonics one is at a loss to understand much of the twentieth century criticism of the Idylls: 'Utterly wanting in unity and coherence of structure... strikingly uneven... a collection of episodes... Tennyson could not tell a story at all'. etc.⁵²

In this scene the rumour that caused Geraint to leave the court is shown to have been well-founded. Nevertheless Balin, unlike Geraint, is not prepared to believe that Guinevere is disloyal to Arthur and his inner repression leads him to outbursts of his former passion, and culminates in his killing of Garlon who tormented him by calling Guinevere's emblem the 'crown-scandalous' (BB 384).

Structurally, 'Balin and Balan' may be said to divide into two major actions both of which describe 'the process by which Balin becomes disillusioned concerning his models'.⁵³ The first, up to line 429 has just been mentioned; the second treats his encounter with Vivien.

In lines 430 to 449 Tennyson introduces a common cyclical element into the structure of this idyll, viz. the element of song. Vivien's song casts out the 'wholesome music of the wood' (BB 430) as its theme is the destruction of Arthur's music. Her own comment is:

'This fire of Heaven,
This old sun-worship, boy, will rise again,
And beat the cross to earth, and break the King
And all his Table' (BB 450-3).

This song finds an echo in the balancing idyll, 'The Last Tournament', when Dagonet accuses Tristram, 'And so thou breakest Arthur's music too' (LT 266).

The theme of misrepresentation, the true and the false, also occurs here as, lying easily, Vivien manages to convince Balin of Guinevere's guilt:

She lied with ease; but horror-stricken he,
Remembering that dark bower at Camelot,
Breathed in a dismal whisper 'It is truth' (BB 517-9).

So unbalanced does Balin become that he defaces his shield, and his 'weird yell' (BB 535) causes Balan to attack him, thinking he is the wood demon. Misrepresentation again takes its toll and 'by a subtle reorganization Tennyson has shown the knight ironically destroyed, as it were, bestially and from within, a fitting end for one who from the first was unable to govern his urges'.⁵⁴

In this way Tennyson introduces Vivien, who is to play such an important role both in the next idyll and in the complete poem in effecting and bringing to a head that corruption which will cause the destruction of the Order. The pessimism of 'Balin and Balan' later finds its equal in 'The Last Tournament', its

counterbalancing idyll in the cyclical arrangement of the Idylls.

The Structure of 'The Last Tournament'

This idyll differs from most of the other idylls by not being an uninterrupted narrative for Tennyson develops a multiplicity of themes and symbols within its complex structure. He makes use of very many structural devices to give coherence to this development, e.g. the flashback (10-239); repetition of lines and phrases for emphasis, (258, 261, 264); and the use of dreams and songs (406-19). These are only three of many. Others include the use of a parallel sequence of events, and cross-reference to Lancelot's sin. The unity of this highly complex idyll is achieved, however, mainly by Tennyson's use of autumn and beast imagery and by his finely structured arrangement of his complex themes. The role of cyclic imagery in creating structural unity has already been pointed out but it is necessary at this stage to relate it to 'The Last Tournament'. The autumn of the Round Table, its collapse, is clearly demonstrated by the following:

yellowing woods (3)... withered leaf (4)... faded fields (53)...with a wet wind blowing (137)...one low roll/ Of autumn thunder (152-3).. and ever the wind blew, and yellowing leaf/ And gloom and gleam, and shower and shorn plume/ Went down it (154-6) ...thick rain (213)...went glooming down in wet and weariness (215) ...the yellowing autumn-tide (241) ...slowly-mellowing avenues (360) ... an ever-showering leaf (491) ...all in a death-dumb autumn-dripping gloom (750).

The beast imagery is also carefully designed to give realistic representation to the varying degrees and types of bestiality opposing Arthur's Hall or undermining it from within. Even the oak stump setting the tone of the idyll has roots 'like some black coil of carven snakes' (LT 13). Arthur asks the peasant,

'What evil beast/ Hath drawn his claws athwart they face?'
(62-3) and he wonders whether his realm will,

From flat confusion and brute violences,
Reel back into the beast, and be no more? (LT 124-5).

Arthur's words fly around in Lancelot's head 'like birds of prey' (LT 138) and Modred's face is seen in his cracked helmet 'like a vermin in its hole' (165). Tristram objects to the prize being proffered 'like a dry bone cast to some hungry hound' (LT 196) yet calls Dagonet a swine: 'For I have flung thee pearls and find thee swine' (310).

But it is the skilful structural arrangement of the various subplots that makes 'The Last Tournament' the equal, perhaps, of even 'The Holy Grail' in reflecting the collapse of the Round Table as a result of internal disunity. When Arthur was able to bind his knights by 'strait vows to his own self' (CA 261) then he

...and his knighthood for a space
Were all one will, and through that strength the King
Drew in the petty pryncedoms under him,
Fought, and in twelve great battles overcame
The heathen hordes, and made a realm and reigned (CA 514-8).

The danger to Arthur's kingdom does not come from outside. Its disintegration takes place when the vows are forgotten and worldly standards prevail. Although Guinevere is possibly not to blame for not noticing Arthur when he 'rode a simple knight among his knights (CA 51) it is her illicit relationship with Lancelot that starts the rift in Arthur's Order. First Geraint, then Balin, always Lancelot, and then Pelleas and Tristram are the leading knights whose lives are affected by Guinevere's disloyalty. 'The Last Tournament' is Tennyson's portrayal of the culminating effects of a breakdown in moral standards, viz.

the bestiality of the Red Knight and the cynicism of the adulterer, Tristram.

The central figure in the structure of this idyll is Tristram. The story begins the day after the tournament (1-9); then there is a flashback, with subordinate incidents within it, in lines 10-239. These incidents relate to the finding of Nestling and the jewels, the report of the Red Knight's barbarism and defiance, and the account of the last tournament (134-239) which is so contrary to the spirit of all Arthur stands for that the Queen

...wroth at Tristram and the lawless jousts,
 Brake up their sports, then slowly to her bower
 Parted, and in her bosom pain was lord (LT 237-9).

Tennyson then reverts to his initial story, even repeating that Dagonet 'Danced like a withered leaf before the hall' (LT 4 and 242). What emerges clearly here is that Gawain's 'mock-knight' (LT 2) proves to be a much more loyal follower of Arthur than the victorious Tristram. He, at least, does not break Arthur's music, whereas Tristram

'...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' (LT 263-6).

Tristram's retort, by way of the cyclical element of song, is that 'we love but while we may' (LT 281). This is the complete antithesis of Arthur's firm belief that 'man's word is God in man' (BB 8). Dagonet's faith in Arthur's ideals is absolute even though he realizes the impossibility of attaining these ideals and must exclaim bitterly that Arthur is

'...the King of fools!
 Conceits himself as God that he can make
 Figs out of thistles, silk from bristles, milk

From burning spurge, honey from hornet-combs,
 And men from beasts - Long live the king of fools!' (LT 354-8).

So they part; Dagonet through the 'slowly-mellowing avenues' (360) and Tristram towards Lyonesse and the west. The symbolism here is trenchant: the autumn imagery together with the reference to Lyonesse is a foreshadowing of Arthur's final battle in the west.

The complexity of structure of this idyll may be seen in the large number of plots which Tennyson interweaves into the theme. Two are parallel inasmuch as they both relate to conquest - the winning of the tournament and the defeating of the Red Knight. Two others are antithetical: Tristram's degradation and the elevation of Dagonet to the role of commentator. Always present is the main plot of the Idylls, viz. the relationships between Arthur, Guinevere and Lancelot. Tennyson enables the story to move quickly by his sensitive moving of the action from one plot to the other and by his controlled use of flashbacks. As Litzinger remarks: 'Tennyson creates an impression of simultaneous action and reinforces one theme by another. ...That the poem conveys a strong impression of unity presents something of a challenge to the critical reader'.⁵⁵

The intricate design of Tristram's ride, with its reminiscences at the 'low lodge' (LT 380) and his consequent dishonourable silence; his dream; Arthur's conquest of the Red Knight and his painful realization that his knights have 'slimed themselves' (LT 470) carries the story further. Throughout this section 'red' imagery dominates: 'ruby-circled neck' (LT 364), 'frozen blood' (LT 412); 'red-pulsing' (LT 479), until Tristram wakes

from his 'red dream' (LT 486). Immediately the colour imagery changes and his meeting with Isolt after he left the 'forest greens' (LT 490) is marked by other colours: 'white hind' (LT 565), 'pale-blooded' (LT 603), 'fuming sulphur blue and green' (LT 612), 'old and gray' (LT 622), and Arthur is recalled as

'That victor of the Pagan throned in hall -
His hair, a sun that rayed from off a brow
Like hillsnow high in heaven, the steel-blue eyes,
The golden beard that clothed his lips with light'
(LT 660-3).

This deliberate variation in colour imagery reflects the idyll's structural change and it is only when Tristram is about to present the necklace to Isolt and is within seconds of his death that Tennyson reverts to 'red' imagery as the 'ruby carcanet' (LT 734), 'the red fruit/ Grown on a magic oak-tree in mid-heaven' (LT 738-9) is brought as a 'last/ Love-offering' (LT 741-2). Just as his lips touch her jewelled throat

Behind him rose a shadow and a shriek-
'Mark's Way', said Mark, and clove him through the brain
(LT 747-8).

The collapse of Tristram and the collapse of Arthur's knights, foreshadow the collapse of the Arthurian ideal. The concluding line of each is a clear indication of the precision of Tennyson's design. He ends the tournament with the words: 'and in her bosom pain was lord' (LT 239), and the conclusion of Arthur's campaign against the Red Knight is 'But in the heart of Arthur pain was lord'⁵⁶(LT 485). Dagonet, the only one in this idyll to hear with Arthur the 'silent music up in heaven' (LT 349), brings the idyll to its tragic close by awaiting Arthur in the deserted bower and sobbing,

'I am thy fool,
And I shall never make thee smile again' (LT 755-6).

'Merlin and Vivien' and 'Guinevere'

The last matching pair in the cyclical structure comprises two of the 1859 idylls. They are similar in that they both feature women who play a major role in the destruction of the Round Table, (unlike Elaine and Enid), but are antithetical in many clearly defined ways. Firstly, Vivien is the personification of evil, of the anti-Christ who wants the 'old sun-worship' (BB 451) to be re-established. Paradoxically, in order to achieve this she must overcome Merlin, the spiritual principle of the Idylls but not a Christian symbol. Antithetically, Guinevere, in a similarly titled idyll, repents and seeks sanctuary in a convent. Her repentance is proof that although the outward trappings of the Order have disappeared, the inward Christian spirit can thrive on sacrifice and defeat. The contribution of these two idylls to the overall structure is, thus, closely aligned with theme.

'For the most part, the structures of these two idylls are the same. One begins with Merlin at Broceliande with Vivien at his feet: the other, with Guinevere at Almsbury, with the little novice'.⁵⁷ 'Merlin and Vivien' continues with a flashback to Mark's court where Vivien decides to please Mark and 'stir the monkish manhood' (MV 35) of Arthur's Table 'till they sting'.⁵⁸ She goes to Camelot and there, like the 'little rat that borest in the dyke' (MV 110) to let in the 'boundless deep' (MV 111) she spreads the whisper of scandal about Lancelot and Guinevere. In this way,

...as Arthur in the highest
Leavened the world, so Vivien in the lowest
...leavened his hall (MV 138-44).

Failing to seduce Arthur, she sets herself to gain

...the most famous man of all those times,
Merlin, who knew the range of all their arts,
Had built the King his havens, ships, and halls (MV 164-6).

The rest of the idyll describes Vivien's attempts to win from
Merlin the secret of the charm. Eventually she succeeds and

Then, in one moment, she put forth the charm
Of woven paces and of waving hands,
And in the hollow oak he lay as dead,
And lost to life and use and name and fame (MV 965-8).

In structure, 'Guinevere' is almost identical. There is also
an account of the present - Guinevere in the convent at Almesbury,
(1-8) - followed by a flashback to events at the Court involving
her relationship with Lancelot. It is important to note that
in both idylls Vivien is a key figure,

...the lissome Vivien, of her court
The wiliest and the worst (G 28-9).

The chronological flow is not interrupted and the two major
episodes are the conversation with the novice and Arthur's
farewell to Guinevere. Guinevere's repentance is strikingly in
contrast with Merlin's defeat where in the 'hollow oak he lay
as dead' (MV 967). Her self-realization is the beginning of a
true humility. From her realization that 'It was my duty to
have loved the highest' (G 652), she can progress to her
confession:

'Ye know me then, that wicked one, who broke
The vast design and purpose of the King.
O shut me round with narrowing nunnery-walls' (G 663-5).

Completely opposite in tone is Vivien's moment of triumph:

Then crying 'I have made his glory mine',
And shrieking out 'O fool!' the harlot leapt
Adown the forest (MV 969-71).

These two idylls match each other in structure, and each incorporates a specific cyclical image to reflect the theme. In 'Merlin and Vivien' it is the beast imagery that comes to the fore, particularly vermin, snakes and the 'foul bird of rapine' (MV 726). In 'Guinevere' the flashback that refers to the role played by Modred and Vivien in his downfall employs similar imagery. Modred is compared with the 'subtle beast' (G 10), but also with the 'green caterpillar' (G 32). His 'narrow foxy face... and gray persistent eye' (G 62-3) cause Guinevere to have nightmares. But the present is a time of 'creeping mist' which

...like a face-cloth to the face,
Clung to the dead earth, and the land was still (G 7-8).

The cyclical image of this idyll is that of storm, mist and darkness, in which Guinevere

...made her face a darkness from the King:
And in the darkness heard his armed feet
Pause by her (G 414-6).

Perhaps the most significant parallel image in the two idylls is the symbolism of waving arms and waving hands. In 'Merlin and Vivien' the charm is 'with woven paces and with waving arms' (MV 205) and Vivien puts forward the charm 'of woven paces and of waving hands' (MV 966) and so defeats Merlin and issues in the destruction of the Round Table. Arthur's spiritual power triumphs in the end, however, for while Guinevere

...grovelled at his feet,
She felt the King's breath wander o'er her neck,
And in the darkness o'er her fallen head,
Perceived the waving of his hands that blest (G 577-80).

This almost sacramental absolution symbolizes one of the important messages of the Idylls, viz that although darkness may seem to

be victorious, the power of the spirit can never be subdued and 'God fulfils himself in many ways' (PA 409).

Conclusion

There seems to be no doubt then that Tennyson's Idylls exhibits a tightness of structure which merges in close unity with theme and imagery in constructing a truly remarkable narrative and symbolic poem. The cyclicity of its imagery is paralleled by the cyclicity of its structure, and the balance of its design is shown by the 'Wheel of Fortune' diagram and the explication of this idea in the previous pages. Structure is always related to theme and, as Ryals states, 'the reason for the increasing complication in form of the ten idylls constituting 'The Round Table' is ...that this complexity symbolizes the frustration of Arthur in working his will and fulfilling his ideals'.⁵⁹ This relationship between theme on the one hand and imagery and structure on the other will be treated in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOURTHEME

'...flat confusion and brute violences...' (LT 124)

Introduction

Tennyson once complained that critics of the Idylls of the King

...have taken my hobby and ridden it too hard, and have explained some things too allegorically, although there is an allegorical or rather a parabolic drift in the poem (HT 442).

His main objection to an over-allegorical explication of his poem was that this formalized the interpretation of the various symbols used whereas he affirmed that 'the thought within the image is much more than any one interpretation' (HT 442). In a similar fashion the various thematic threads which comprise the completed tapestry of the Idylls cannot be defined too precisely without detracting from the composition of the whole poem, for each 'theme' gains validity as it becomes progressively, and cyclically, more united to imagery and structure. Although Tennyson's own comments on the Idylls were quoted in Chapter Three of this thesis, some of them need to be studied once again before any relevant estimate of the themes of the Idylls of the King can be formulated.

One definitive statement of the poet's is that Camelot 'is everywhere symbolic of the gradual growth of human beliefs and institutions, and of the spiritual development of man' (HT 442). He illustrates this by describing Merlin's hall with its four-tiered sculptures symbolizing man's gradual ascendancy over the

beast. He also calls it 'the dream of man coming into practical life and ruined by one sin' but adds that 'it is not the history of one man or of one generation but of a whole cycle of generations' (HT 443). It is obvious from these remarks that whatever themes are to be found in the Idylls they must be universal ones if they are to reflect Tennyson's purposes in composing this poem. This does not diminish the importance of Arthur's role. Indeed, Tennyson's last addition to his Arthurian work was line 38 of 'To the Queen', which he inserted in 1891, just one year before his death. This line: 'Ideal manhood closed in real man' reinforces the symbolism of the statue of Arthur which Merlin made to top the four great zones of sculpture at Camelot. Here it is significant that 'ideal manhood' is said to be an integral part of 'real man' in a poem that shadows 'Sense at war with Soul' ('To the Queen' 37). The antithetical concepts of the Ideal being one with the Actual, while also being threatened by it are fundamental to any thematic interpretation of the poem.

This conflict, referred to in 'To the Queen' which was written in 1872, is mentioned by Tennyson again in 1889:

My meaning in the Idylls of the King was spiritual. I took the legendary stories of the Round Table as illustrations. I intended Arthur to represent the Ideal Soul of Man coming into contact with the warring elements of the flesh (HT 443).

Throughout the Idylls it is clear that Arthur does represent the 'Ideal Soul of Man' and it is equally clear that Arthur's ultimate defeat is caused by the 'warring elements of the flesh' with Guinevere at their centre. Hallam quotes his father's words in this regard:

The whole is the dream of man coming into practical life and ruined by one sin. Birth is a mystery and death is a mystery, and in the midst lies the tableland of life, and its struggles and performances. It is not the history of one man or of one generation but of a whole cycle of generations (HT 443).

This 'one sin' that must be regarded as a contributory factor in the decline and ultimate disintegration of Arthur's Table is adultery. But, in Tennyson, Arthur himself does not commit this sin.¹ On the other hand, because he is

Rapt in this fancy of his Table Round,
And swearing men to vows impossible
To make them like himself (LE 129-31)

he cannot suspect Lancelot and Guinevere of base motives and, consequently, allows adultery to flourish. Arthur's 'one sin' in the Idylls is moral blindness, then, a blindness which he only occasionally realizes, as when he admits to Geraint

...I was pricked with some reproof,
As one that let foul wrong stagnate and be,
By having looked too much through alien eyes,
And wrought too long with delegated hands,
Not used mine own (GE 889-93).

Even at a late stage in the development of the Round Table, just prior to the last tournament, he cannot appreciate the regression which his knights have undergone and can only ask ineffectually

...have I dreamed the bearing of our knights
Tells of a manhood ever less and lower? (LT 120-1).

Arthur's self-doubt, which is, equally, doubt in the ability of his Order to withstand the onslaught of the powers of evil, seems to polarize the relationship between man's higher and his lower nature. Here Tennyson was possibly influenced by Darwin's theory of Evolution which colours the whole of his 1886 poem, 'Locksley Hall Sixty Years After'. There, after stating prosaically that 'even the homely farm can teach us there is

something in descent', (26) Tennyson premises

Evolution ever climbing after some ideal good,
And Reversion ever dragging Evolution in the mud (199-200),

and finally asks

Have we risen from out the beast, then back into the beast
again? (148)

The Idylls of the King poses this same question when Arthur is forced to ask himself:

...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? (LT 122-5)

This cyclicity of progression and regression, of construction and fragmentation, appears in many guises in the Idylls of the King. It is, in fact, the basic theme of the poem and unites very closely both the cyclical imagery and the cyclical structuring which have been discussed in the preceding chapters of this thesis. By stating that Camelot symbolizes the growth of human beliefs and institutions and by then depicting the destruction of this 'newer, stronger hall' (HG 728) to which the returning knights rode

On heaps of ruin, hornless unicorns,
Cracked basilisks, and splintered cockatrices (HG 714-5),

Tennyson presents to his contemporaries a fundamentally pessimistic message. It is that Victorian society is a decadent civilization which can save itself only if the lessons of the Idylls are taken to heart. These lessons form the many subordinate themes of the poem and are often closely aligned to specific cyclical images. This is not on a one-for-one basis, however, as a specific motif, e.g. beast imagery, may relate to a number of these themes.

An early theme which was prominent in the 1859 idylls is that of misrepresentation, defined by Tennyson as the true and the false. In the final ordering of the Idylls it maintains its significance inasmuch as it contributes to the fracturing of that personal integrity which is essential to Arthur's ideals. Nevertheless its position as a major theme is supplanted by one which Tennyson defines as Sense at war with Soul. This latter theme offers the most important reason for the fragmentation of Arthurian society, the unfortunate model of the disintegration of any society which allows the standards of Sense to outweigh those of Soul. Another theme is that of the ideal as opposed to the actual. The quest, dreams, madness, visions all occur, in Johnson's phrase, as the 'imaginative counterpart'² of the actions of the knights. At times the line between this theme and the two other subordinate themes already mentioned is a very fine one but the confusing of the ideal and the actual remains of considerable importance throughout. Then there is the subordinate theme which is closest in type to the all-embracing leit motif of fragmentation which is implicit in Merlin's words:

Confusion, and illusion, and relation,
Elusion, and occasion, and evasion' (GL 281-2).

This is unity versus disruption, for

the poet constantly keeps before the reader the disparity between the orderly universe and a chaotic world fumbling to duplicate macrocosmic order by means of social and practical institutions.³

One other subordinate theme which merits attention is that relating to the loss of personal integrity. This links up very closely with the cyclical image of 'naming' which was discussed in Chapter Two.

It can be seen, then, that these themes are indicative of Tennyson's interest in the personal and social significance of the Arthurian story, not in its historical and national importance. In this he differs from Malory, the author of the Alliterative Morte Darthure and Lajamon who are looked upon by Vinaver as representing the 'English Tradition'.⁴ That Tennyson, the Poet Laureate, ignored this tradition and universalized his Arthuriad both accounts for his use of parabolic drift and stresses the importance he gave to the Idylls of the King. This thematic breaking away from Malory even in instances when the actual story details are taken from the Morte Darthur is even more significant than the many structural changes that Tennyson effects and which were mentioned in Chapter One. Particularly his treatment of the Grail legend illustrates this point. Vinaver remarks that Malory uses the Grail quest merely as 'a prelude to the tragedy' (96-7). It is 'but a scenic arrangement laid for a play of light and shadow'. Tennyson's purposes in using the legend are very different. The spiritual quest becomes a disruptive element as Arthur's knights 'follow wandering fires' (HG 319), but the poet's problem was that he doubted 'whether such a subject as the San Graal could be handled in these days without incurring a charge of irreverence. It would be too much like playing with sacred things' (HT 441). 'The Holy Grail', once Tennyson had found a way of treating the subject through the independent narrator, Percivale, became a central idyll both in the structure and theme of the series and, as Ryals says,

What we find especially in 'The Holy Grail' and 'The Last Tournament' is the decay of the king's order indicated by the 'broken music' of the narrative flow. The tensions emanating from the guilt, emotional despondency, and

failure of the principal actors in these idylls, are thus embodied in the very structure of the poem.⁵

There are, however, indications that the message to be drawn from the Idylls, although fundamentally pessimistic, is not one of complete gloom. Lancelot would 'die a holy man' (HG 1418), Guinevere becomes known for her 'good deeds and her pure life' (G 687), and Bedivere fancies he hears

Sounds, as if some fair city were one voice
Around a king returning from his wars (PA 460-1).

The last line of the Idylls: 'And the new sun rose bringing the new year' (PA 469), suggests a note of optimism in the renewal of the seasonal cycle which, up to that point, had suggested advancing dissolution and decay. A study of the themes already mentioned will help to clarify Tennyson's purposes in the Idylls.

The War of Sense and Soul

One aspect of this theme appears from the following lines of 'To the Queen':

...and shadowing Sense at war with Soul,
Ideal manhood clothed in real man (37-8).

Tennyson seems to be equating Sense with 'real man' and Soul with 'ideal manhood' and then combining both in the person of Arthur. In order to preserve Arthur's image as the ideal man, the poet was forced to deviate considerably from Malory's portrayal of a vital Arthur who had had sexual relations with Lyonors and King Lot's wife prior to his marriage with Guinevere.⁶ He avoided any reference to his incest⁷ with his half-sister, Igraine's daughter, although this sin would have given immediate thematic validity to the collapse of the Round Table and shown that 'the whole is the dream of man coming into practical life

and ruined by one sin' (HT 443). Tennyson overcame this problem by attributing to Arthur a less obvious weakness but, nevertheless, one which would convincingly bring about his downfall. This was, as has already been noted, his overtrusting delegation of authority to his subordinates - a mode of action praiseworthy in itself but followed by disastrous consequences. He admits to Geraint that he has used 'alien eyes' and 'delegated hands' (GE 891-2) to the detriment of the best interests of his kingdom. Although, perhaps, no 'sin' in a theological sense, it was definitely a shortcoming in the political sphere.

Hallam Tennyson sees this war of Sense and Soul more as 'typified in individuals, with the subtle interaction of character upon character' (HT 446) and Arthur always dominant as the central figure. The three main figures in this drama are clearly Arthur, Guinevere and Lancelot with Arthur symbolizing Soul and the others Sense. Adicks, although he does not mention Lancelot, makes a similar statement:

The principal figures in the allegory are Arthur, as Soul, and Guinevere, as Sense. It is their relationship that dictates the framework of the entire Idylls.⁸

Tennyson universalizes this theme when he says,

By King Arthur I always meant the soul, and by the Round Table the passions and capacities of a man,⁹

and a study of the Idylls indicates clearly that Merlin, Vivien and others are all involved in this never-ending war.

The incompatibility of Sense and Soul¹⁰ reveals itself at the beginning of the Idylls, for we read that, when Arthur came to the aid of King Leodogran, Guinevere 'saw him not, or marked not, if she saw' (CA 53) whereas Arthur,

...looking downward as he past,
Felt the light of her eyes into his life
Smite on the sudden' (CA 55-7).

This clear dichotomy is Tennyson's own as Malory simply relates:

And there had Arthur the first sight of Guenever, the
king's daughter of Cameliard, and ever after he loved her
(Malory I, xvi, p.41).

Malory's Arthur also disregards Merlin's warning that

Guenever was not wholesome for him to take to wife, for he
warned him that Launcelot should love her, and she him
again (Malory III, i, p.64).

Malory's approach is that of chronicler; Tennyson's that of
moralist and poet. It is for this reason that the themes which
underlie the Idylls move concurrently with the imagery and the
structure of the poem.

The paradox of Arthur's position at this stage is that he
realizes that he needs Guinevere to complement him in order to
'have power on this dark world to lighten it' (CA 92), but he
cannot know that 'the children born of thee are sword and fire,
Red ruin, and the breaking up of laws' (G 422-3). He needs to
be united with her because 'Soul must act through Body' but
this alliance, while necessary, 'brings the inevitable danger
of separation and of conflict'.¹¹ Consequently he marries her,
attended by his knights

...in stainless white,
The fair beginners of a nobler time,
And glorying in their vows and him' (CA 455-7),

at the sacred altar which 'blossomed white with May' (CA 460).
It is obvious that Tennyson is deliberately incorporating the
colour symbolism of red and white to symbolize Sense and Soul.
Although not an original symbolism in itself, it is original
in the context of the Arthurian tradition as Malory's account
reads simply:

Then was the high feast made ready, and the king was wedded at Camelot unto Dame Guenever in the church of Saint Stephen's . . . (Malory III, v, p.66).

Ironically, whereas Arthur imagines that Guinevere is necessary to his great designs, the knights in their enthusiastic song of joy after the wedding make no mention of her. In this first idyll Guinevere has not yet become a negative force but there is no indication that Arthur's hopes for her and for their union will be realized. It is a period of calm before a storm; a storm that will originate in the relationship between Guinevere and Lancelot, and will culminate in the spiritual disaster of the Grail quest and the bestiality of Arthur's knights in their campaign against the Red Knight.

Suitably, there is no mention of Guinevere in the next idyll, 'Gareth and Lynette' because, as the representative of Sense, she has no place in the springtime of the Order when those who cannot commit themselves wholly to Arthur's ideals must 'abide/ Without, among the cattle of the field' (GL 269-70). This period of calm cannot last indefinitely, though, and the fragility of this idyllic time becomes apparent when

...a rumour rose about the Queen,
Touching her guilty love for Lancelot (MG 24-5).

In spite of using Guinevere to represent Sense in his allegory, Tennyson manages not to type-cast her for she is presented in the Geraint idylls as a kind, considerate friend who displays remarkably unselfish qualities. Indeed, the only censure at this stage, must be apportioned to Geraint who, on hearing the rumour for which there was no proof, 'not less . . . believed it' (MG 28). Nevertheless, the damage has been done for, by giving

occasion for rumours, the Queen has started to undermine the faith and trust upon which the security of the Round Table is founded.

This is important, for it is in Guinevere that Arthur incarnates his vision. He feels that unless he is joined to her he cannot 'will my will, nor work my work/ Wholly' (CA 87-8). Mythically this implies that 'woman is the material principle as man is the spiritual'.¹² Guinevere's most stressed quality in the Idylls is beauty and it is this beauty which makes the Arthurian ideals palatable to Arthur's knights once the initial fervour of 'a momentary likeness of the King' (CA 270) has passed. She is taken by Balin as his ideal and he desires 'some goodly cognizance of Guinevere/ In lieu of this rough beast upon my shield' (BB 191-2). With this to bolster his idealism 'he felt his being move/ In music with his Order, and the King' (BB 207-8) but Tennyson then shows that a morality not founded on Soul cannot last. Balin chances to be the unwilling spectator of a meeting between the Queen and Lancelot and becomes disillusioned and 'mad for strange adventure' (BB 284). Tennyson's use of colour and flower symbolism, of deliberate antithesis and of striking epigram in lines 235-67, represents some of the ways he embodies the theme of Sense versus Soul, passion versus morality. The 'spiritual lily' is no match for the 'garden rose/ Deep-hued and many folded', and the symbolism of the 'walk of roses' which is crossed by a 'walk of lilies' is indicative of Lancelot's spiritual conflict in which Sense finally overcomes Soul:

Then Lancelot lifted his large eyes; they dwelt
 Deep-tranced on hers, and could not fall: her hue
 Changed at his gaze: so turning side by side
 They past (BB 272-5).

But once his initial madness has passed, Balin turns his anger on himself for imputing base motives to Guinevere and Lancelot, and for having allowed his violence at King Pellam's court to bring shame to Guinevere's emblem on his shield. Vivien overhears these self-recriminations and lying 'with ease' (BB 517) she fabricates an incident about Lancelot who, purportedly,

...drew down from out his night-black hair
 And mumbled that white hand whose ringed caress
 Had wandered from her own King's golden head,
 And lost itself in darkness, till she cried... (BB 503-6).

His ideals dashed once more, Balin loses all self-control and is mistaken by his brother for the Wood-devil. Even at his moment of dying, Balin's faith in Guinevere re-affirms itself and he believes Balan's words:

...they lied
 Pure as our own true Mother is our Queen (BB 605-6).

Guinevere's power to influence others in the Idylls is primarily because she is a distinct individual, a very human figure. She is above all a vital woman and, as Buckley says,

As a woman she fully indulges her selfish passions, yet seeks final atonement in a life of service; to the nuns at Almesbury she offers the example of the selfless dedication that Arthur vainly hoped she would bring to his kingdom.¹³

Guinevere, although the main protagonist of Sense, is never vicious. Even towards her rival, Elaine, she shows pity when she reproves Lancelot, 'Ye might at least have done her so much grace' (LE 1300). Vivien, on the other hand, always exemplifies the vicious traits of Sense. She is another central figure in

the theme of Sense versus Soul as Tennyson shows by having her so confuse the impulsive Balin with her suggestive implications of Guinevere's adultery that he is precipitated to his death. Her rhetoric with its sensuous 'night-black hair' and 'white hand'; 'golden head' and 'darkness' might have unsettled a personality far less disturbed than Balin's. Her words confirm his suspicions and make that music in him which is 'faint and far off' (BB 214) disappear completely.

The extent to which Sense infects Soul is seen in the next idyll, 'Merlin and Vivien' which 'carries on the pattern of bringing into opposition two characters, one representing the inner integrity of the spiritual being, the other the corrupting powers of the world'.¹⁴ In her attempt to destroy Round Table idealism Vivien first tries to corrupt King Arthur but, when this proves unsuccessful, she soon decides to turn her attention to Merlin, 'the most famous man of all those times' (MV 164). In her attempts to win the charm from him she becomes the personification of Sense and Tennyson, by judicious use of sensuous description often interwoven with cyclic 'beast' imagery, has us follow her campaign against Merlin who, as the spiritual principle of the Idylls, may be said to represent Soul. The 'lissome' Vivien clings to Merlin like a snake after she 'writhed' toward him and 'slided' up his knee (MV 236-40). She 'twined' her hollow feet together and then 'made her lithe arm round his neck/ Tighten' (MV 612-3) before, like a snake mesmerizing its victim, she 'let her eyes/ Speak for her, glowing on him' (MV 613-4). The fact that Vivien is able by her artifices to undermine the resolution of the designer of

Camelot is most important as it exposes the potential instability of Arthur's realm. Once Merlin is overcome, the rebellion of the flesh within the kingdom becomes more unbridled. As Priestley declares:

The defection of Guinevere is by no means the sole, or perhaps the chief, cause of the failure of Arthur's plans. It is, to be sure, important, since it tends constantly to reinforce other influences operating towards the catastrophe. But the activities of Vivien, her capture of Merlin ... are all profoundly significant.¹⁵

Tennyson uses the paratactic mode with great effect at the moment of Merlin's final weakening, and the uncoiling of the 'snake of gold' heralds the darkness of the storm:

She paused, she turned away, she hung her head,
The snake of gold slid from her hair, the braid
Slipt and uncoiled itself, she wept afresh,
And the dark wood grew darker toward the storm
In silence ... (MV 885-9).

The building up of tension in the first line together with the use of the 'gold snake'-artifact in the next two merges with the ominous statement that the wood grew darker toward the storm 'in silence'. Vivien's dramatic ability, her setting the stage as it were for an emotional storm, is sufficient to cause Merlin to weaken and yield.

After the climactic dénouement of 'Merlin and Vivien', the following idyll 'Lancelot and Elaine' once again has Guinevere symbolizing a particular aspect of Sense, viz. cynicism. In lines 120-134 she laughs scornfully at Arthur's ideals of making his knights like himself. She declares that the vows he requires the knights to make are impossible to keep and then states her own philosophy of life:

For who loves me must have a touch of earth;
The low sun makes the colour (LE 133-4).

This cynicism finds even stronger expression later in Tristram who traces his own cynical attitude back to Guinevere's adultery. Isolt calls him a 'false harper' for persuading her to break her marriage vows by saying that 'Guinevere had sinned against the highest' (LT 563-6), to which he replies that it is sweet 'to sin in leading-strings' having 'crowned warrant' for their sin (LT 570-2). These pointed references to the adulterous example set by Guinevere, who was initially seen by the knights as an exemplification of Arthur's ideals, underscore the Queen's fatal role in the fortunes of the Round Table. Guinevere's breaking of her vows serves as encouragement for others to break theirs and, usually, death follows. In this instance Tristram is murdered by king Mark. Previously Balin breaks his vows of moderation and gentleness and is killed by his brother; and Elaine, so prepared to sacrifice even her virginity in order to win Lancelot's love, dies because

The shackles of an old love straitened him,
His honour rooted in dishonour stood,
And faith unfaithful kept him falsely true (LE 870-2).

It is in this idyll that the conflict of Sense and Soul is seen in normal human relationships. The 'lily maid' Elaine, can read in Lancelot's features that

The great and guilty love he bare the Queen,
In battle with the love he bare his Lord,
Had marred his face, and marked it ere his time (LE 244-6).

Even when he sees Elaine radiant in her maiden beauty, Lancelot's natural integrity causes him to experience only 'a sort of sacred fear' (LE 352) but not physical love, as he has been so tainted by Sense, by his relationship with Guinevere, that he remains true to her with a false loyalty. Whereas Merlin's

defeat can be viewed only in allegorical terms, Elaine is at her most human when she 'betrays her own purity, and indeed her life, by desperately offering her whole being on any terms to Love or else to Death'.¹⁶ Soul, in this idyll represented by Elaine, has fallen prey to the passions of Sense. Tennyson's treatment of his theme differs considerably from that of Malory who has Elaine scheme in order to get Lancelot to make love to her. Malory's Lancelot, after his initial anger at being duped, 'took her up in his arms and kissed her, for she was as fair a lady, and thereto young, and as wise as any was that time living' (Malory XI, iii, p.328).

That the war between Sense and Soul cannot be expressed in simplistic terms is part of the argument of 'Lancelot and Elaine'. Lancelot's role seems to vacillate between two polarities: in his relationship with Guinevere he is definitely not the embodiment of Sense for it is Guinevere who prefers 'this garden rose/ Deep-hued and many-folded' (BB 264-5) to the 'spiritual lily' (BB 259) that Lancelot describes. But the dichotomy becomes clearer when, representing Sense, he comes into contact with the 'lily maid of Astolat'. Ultimately the death of Elaine acts as a catalyst, forcing him to look inward at himself, even though he does not attain immediate peace of mind:

So groaned Sir Lancelot in remorseful pain,
Not knowing he should die a holy man (LE 1417-8).

Cyclical colour imagery which plays an important role in the structure of both 'The Holy Grail' and the complete Idylls of the King is also important with regard to Tennyson's theme of the war between Sense and Soul. Normally white represents

purity and the Soul; red represents passions and Sense. 'The Holy Grail' initially follows this symbolism as the nun's cell has 'white walls' (HG 119) and Galahad's armour is 'white' (HG 135). But, when Arthur hears that his knights have impetuously made a vow to pursue the vision of the Grail, he declares they are not Galahads but knights

...that in twelve great battles splashed and dyed
The strong White Horse in his own heathen blood (HG 311-12).

In this last use of 'white' in the idyll it is not the white of the Soul that is referred to but the 'White Horse' of heathendom. Furthermore when this whiteness is dyed with red it signifies the victory of Arthur's ideals over paganism, of Soul over Sense. But the 'red' of the Grail will be destructive of Arthur's Order and will, therefore, unite with Sense in overcoming Soul mainly because the knights are following 'wandering fires' (HG 319). The 'Blood-red' of the Grail vision cannot be seen by Arthur's knights who are all, with the exception of Galahad, so tainted by human passions and by the sin of breaking their vows that they cannot achieve the 'Soul' of the Grail quest. Consequently, there is an inverted colour symbolism here which Tennyson uses in order to place in sharp relief the growing ascendancy of Sense in its war with Soul. Galahad sees the Grail, which always remains with him, in the following way:

Fainter by day, but always in the night
Blood-red, and sliding down the blackened marsh
Blood-red, and on the naked mountain top
Blood-red, and in the sleeping mere below
Blood-red (HG 472-6).

The measure of success of the nun and the knights in achieving the vision of the Grail is suggested by the varying degrees of redness which Tennyson allows those few who come close to it.

The holy nun, who does not attain as great a level of communion as Galahad, reports that she saw the Holy Grail 'rose-red with beatings in it' which dyed the walls of her cell with 'rosy colours' (HG 118-20). Percivale eventually sees the Holy Grail hang above Galahad's head, 'redder than any rose' (HG 521) and Sir Bors, far more faintly, sees the Grail 'in colour like the fingers of a hand/ Before a burning taper' (HG 690-1). No other knight sees the Holy Grail as clearly but Lancelot has a terrifying, mystical experience during which he thinks he sees the Holy Grail 'all palled in crimson samite' (HG 844). Galahad himself achieves full communion with the Grail and vanishes into the 'spiritual city' (HG 526), leaving Percivale to see 'a rose-red sparkle' (HG 530) which he felt sure came from the Holy Grail. The description of Gawain's quest is devoid of this colour imagery as he was soon 'a-wearied of the quest' (HG 741) and dissipated his 'twelvemonth and a day' (HG 74) in the pursuit of pleasure.

The war between Sense and Soul has taken a new turn and, as Arthur foresaw, the impetuous spiritual quest has exposed the weaknesses of his Order. But it is not only the knights who have been found wanting. Arthur himself, representative of Soul throughout the Idylls, 'is conspicuously ineffective when brought into dramatic relation with the real men of the Round Table and the complex tumultuous woman who is his Queen'.¹⁷ He is effective against the 'White Horse' of paganism but unless evil shows itself openly in the Round Table situation he is bound to respect the theoretic integrity of his knights who have all sworn vows binding themselves to him. 'Indeed, for

him even to suspect them of evil would be to be guilty of that very failure of trust which is the principal error of people like Geraint'.¹⁸ As a result the seeds of corruption can flourish unobserved by Arthur who can comprehend fully the 'sacred madness of the bard' (HG 873) but is unable to understand Lancelot's mental anguish. Had Arthur been able to communicate better with his knights he would have paused to think on hearing Lancelot's words, 'in the great sea wash away my sin' (HG 803) and would, possibly, have accepted Lancelot's offer some time later to lead his followers against the Red Knight's Table in the North.

In the following idyll, 'Pelleas and Ettarre', Tennyson once again treats the theme of Sense versus Soul on the level of the sensual versus the spiritual. Ettarre's beauty seems to Pelleas like 'a rosy dawn kindled in stainless heavens' and he is abashed by the beauty of her flesh 'as though it were the beauty of her soul' (PE 68 and 74). The poet sets the 'flesh' against the 'soul' in this last line, and in the broader area of the idyll it is clear that Ettarre with her 'large eyes, the haunts of scorn' (PE 71) represents the flesh, or Sense; and the ingenuous and infatuated Pelleas, the Soul. Initially Tennyson's story is little more than a retelling of Malory's tale but then, in order to point out the destructive effects of Sense, he alters Malory's ending¹⁹ so that Pelleas can undergo a metamorphosis of character and assume a bestiality which will hasten the downfall of Arthur's Table.

The rest of the idyll depicts the destructive effect Sense has on Soul as Pelleas sinks to viciousness through the stages of

wrath, disillusionment and hatred. It is especially the 'beast' imagery that carries this thematic thread. His disillusionment follows Percivale's emphatic, 'Why then let men couple at once with wolves' (PE 526): a defence of Arthur's integrity but a tacit admission of Guinevere's adultery and the knights' faithlessness to their vows. For Pelleas, Merlin's hall no longer contains 'all that belongs to knighthood' (PE 8) but it is a 'black nest of rats' (PE 544). Finally the idyll concludes with lines which are so vicious in tone that they confirm the ascendancy of Sense and foreshadow the cataclysmic end of the Round Table and of Arthur's ideals. The two 'beast' symbols of Vivien, the epitome of Sense, are recalled here as Pelleas leaves 'hissing' (PE 590), and a long silence descends on the hall: 'as in the grove all song/ Beneath the shadow of some bird of prey' (PE 594-5). The powerful influence of Sense is so apparent that Modred instinctively knows that the end of the Round Table cannot be far off.

Within the relatively complicated structure of 'The Last Tournament' Tennyson points to the lowering of moral standards in Arthur's court now that the informing flame of idealism and enthusiasm has departed. The cynicism of Tristram and the Red Knight has a mortal effect on the more impressionable knights who no longer have the moral resilience to withstand the forces of Sense. Only Dagonet is able to defend Arthur's standards. Guinevere can feel that 'in her bosom pain was lord' (HG 239) but must remain passive as her own guilt prevents her from taking any stand against the insidious advance of evil. Tennyson's imagery of autumn, beast and music is also in accord with the changing conditions within the Order. Even when Arthur

takes command he cannot control the licentiousness of his followers who after trampling on the fallen Red Knight, 'sank his head in mire and slimed themselves' (LT 470). They even forget their vows and massacre defenceless women. The irony of this shameful victory is that it makes all the ways safe from shore to shore although 'in the heart of Arthur pain was lord' (LT 485). This reversion to bestiality confirms Arthur's earlier doubts regarding the integrity of his Order, doubts which he hoped his campaign against the Red Knight would prove to be unfounded:

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?' (LT 120-5)

The retreat of Soul before the onslaught of Sense is now an established fact and everywhere the incidence of beast symbolism stresses this. Modred's face shows 'like a vermin in its hole' (LT 165) and Tristram objects to his prize being presented 'like a dry bone cast to some hungry hound' (LT 196), yet he thinks nothing of saying to Dagonet, 'For I have flung thee pearls and find thee swine' (LT 310).

This beast imagery, indicating that bestiality is supplanting uprightness and idealism, is not the only sign that Sense is taking command. The cyclical image of music, till now such a positive symbol, starts its downward path as 'broken music', symbolizing discord and the destruction of harmonious relations. Dagonet prefers the 'broken music' (LT 258) of his brains to Tristram's 'broken music' (LT 259) of adultery with Mark's Isolt. He states that this adultery 'breaketh Arthur's music

too' (LT 266), and the fact that the Queen is false cannot excuse Tristram for breaking his knightly vows. Litzinger observes in this regard:

Lancelot and Tristram were great and good. Because they have violated their vows to Arthur and Isolt of the White Hands respectively, they have brought their fates upon themselves and, in so doing, have corrupted the Court of Arthur. The young knights in their savagery are simply the logical extensions of the degradation of Arthur's chief knights.²⁰

Just as Tristram excuses his adultery by referring to Guinevere's faithlessness, so he, in turn, serves as an excuse for unknighly conduct in his inferiors. His influence encourages the court to unrestrained 'mirth so loud/ Beyond all use' (LT 235-6) and Guinevere is forced to break up the revels and retire sadly to her bower, and 'in her bosom pain was lord' (LT 239).

Dagonet realizes, however, that conditions are ripe for the ascendancy of Sense, as the security of the land and Guinevere's guilt both encourage the knights to question Arthur's kingship. He depicts them as playing at ducks and drakes 'with Arthur's vows on the great lake of fire' (LT 345), and the realization that all Arthur's ideals have been thwarted becomes unbearable for him when Guinevere flees the court. Dagonet's last words to Arthur on his return are undeniably true and sound the death-knell of Arthur's Table, and of Soul:

'I am thy fool,
And I shall never make thee smile again' (LT 755-6).

The sensual has now taken over but it cannot achieve any lasting satisfaction. Even the pleasure that Isolt feels in her 'white embrace' (LT 511) of Tristram, and Tristram's joy

in 'fondling her light hands' (LT 596) is dispersed by her anger at Tristram's words:

'May God be with thee, sweet, when old and gray,
And past desire' (LT 622-3).

After the acrimonious conversation that follows, Tristram's exasperated cry for food and wine is, strangely enough, the means of reconciling the two lovers. As their love is mainly a sensual one, the satisfaction of their sensual appetite for food and drink is symbolic of this reconciliation:

Come, I am hungered and half-angered - meat,
Wine, wine - and I will love thee to the death,
And out beyond into the dream to come (LT 713-5).

In spite of this, and notwithstanding the 'crowned warrant' (LT 572) they had for their sin, their love is short-lived. An even baser representative of Sense, the 'shambling king',²¹(LT 542), arrives and 'Mark's way', the way of Sense, is victorious in 'The Last Tournament'.

Having fled from the Court and taken refuge at Almesbury, Guinevere is no longer the proud Queen, symbolic of Sense, but in her new humility becomes, to a degree, the representative of Soul. By having Guinevere flee to Almesbury before the death of Arthur Tennyson follows the tradition in Laȝamon and others, and breaks away from Malory who places the flight after Arthur's death. He does this in order to contrive a meeting between Arthur and his Queen so that the effects of her sin on the ideals of the Round Table can be clearly stated. As Arthur's words set out in retrospect the course of this war of Sense versus Soul and, in so doing, trace the rise and fall of his ideal society, they are quoted here:

I was first of all the kings who drew
 The knighthood-errant of this realm and all
 The realms together under me, their Head,
 In that fair order of my Table Round,
 A glorious company, the flower of men,
 To serve as model for the mighty world,
 And be the fair beginning of a time.
 I made them lay their hands in mine and swear
 To reverence the King, as if he were
 Their conscience, and their conscience as their King,
 To break the heathen and uphold the Christ (G 457-67).

...

Then came thy shameful sin with Lancelot;
 Then came the sin of Tristram and Isolt;
 Then others, following these my mightiest knights,
 And drawing foul ensample from fair names,
 Sinned also, tell the loathsome opposite
 Of all my heart had destined did obtain,
 And all through thee! (G 484-90)

Here Arthur, as Soul, clearly places full blame for the destruction of his Order on Guinevere, but he could hardly not have known in his heart of hearts that he was himself partly responsible for the deterioration of his Order on account of his having bound them by vows 'the which/No man can keep' (GL 267-8). It is precisely because Arthur is depicted as the ideal, as a completely blameless King, that Tennyson was forced to disregard the earthly touches which make Malory's Arthur so convincing, and consequently transfer 'all the blame and stain to the women of the piece'.²² Arthur's hamartia in the Morte Darthur, his fatal passion for his own sister, must be ignored, but Guinevere's too human love for Lancelot must be accorded the full blame. Arthur's slightly hysterical accusation that Guinevere,

...like a new disease, unknown to men,
 Creeps, no precaution used, among the crowd (G 515-6),

does not sound as sincere as Guinevere's repentance, for he cannot have been unaware of his own partial responsibility. Arthur's admission that he had 'let foul wrongs stagnate and be' (GE 890) is more typical of his honesty, and his lack of balance at this meeting must be attributed to the weakening effect

which the inroads of Sense have made on the resistance of Soul. This was seen taken to its extreme in the history of Merlin. Tennyson's belief in the inherent noble qualities of Mankind is reaffirmed in Guinevere's consequent self-reproach which is reminiscent of Arthur's 'might we ...have power on this dead world to make it live' (CA 90 and 93). With Arthur gone, Guinevere reflects:

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:
 ...
 We needs must love the highest when we see it
 Not Lancelot, nor another. (G 649-56).

In this idyll Tennyson deliberately allows the polarity of Sense and Soul to appear in sharp relief but also, like Arthur's city, to move 'so weirdly in the mist' that Sense seems to become Soul and Soul, Sense. Arthur, especially in the final idyll, 'is no longer so much a symbol of Soul, or of the Ideal, as of defeated mankind asking a question'.²³ Arthur can wonder why it is possible to find God in the 'shining of the stars' and 'the flowering of His fields' but not in 'His ways with men' (PA 9-11). Being too close to the life of his followers and his Queen, Arthur cannot see a specific moral pattern evolving as clearly as is able to deduce a physical pattern in the rest of Creation. He becomes tormented with self-doubt and wonders, indeed, 'whether I be king' (PA 145). But Tennyson, Priestley continues, can see a moral pattern, and this he symbolizes in the role given to Excalibur: 'What the pattern is, Arthur cannot see; but that his life began with a solemn arming and ends with a solemn disarming suggests a completion of a cycle,

a cycle whose meaning may not be clear to Arthur, but is clear to those who armed him' (251). Tennyson sees a cyclical pattern of moral renewal which, although it does not eliminate the pessimistic evidence of the Idylls that the ideal Order will not easily flourish in human society, nevertheless affirms that the fears of those who forecast a total victory for Sense 'are morning shadows huger than the shapes/ That cast them' ('To the Queen', 63-4). Tennyson's conclusion is that the warfare between Sense and Soul will be an unending one with Sense appearing to be victorious. But the cyclical process of death and renewal will go on repeating itself as the new sun rises 'bringing the New Year' (PA 469).

The theme of Sense versus Soul has, as one of its practical implications, the problem of marital disharmony. This is seen on a philosophical level in Arthur's marriage of Sense to Soul, but it appears in even more human terms in the relationship between Geraint and Enid which places in sharper focus the disharmony of the marriage of Arthur and Guinevere. In the two Geraint idylls Enid 'undergoes a series of tests imposed by Geraint, who comes to know what true marriage is'²⁴ only after he has learned to distinguish between appearance and reality. This concept of misrepresentation, or the true and the false, is another subsidiary theme which Tennyson uses as a unifying thread in the Idylls.

Misrepresentation

This, the fundamental theme of the 1859 'Idylls', gradually became a secondary one as Tennyson's purposes crystallized but,

nevertheless, it remained of considerable importance in the final poem of 1886. Misrepresentation, or the true and the false, was obviously the underlying theme of the trial publication of six copies in 1857 entitled 'Enid and Nimue : The True and the False'. The reason for this title is clear. 'Enid', later divided by Tennyson into two idylls, viz. 'The Marriage of Geraint' and 'Geraint and Enid', is an account of Enid's loyalty to Geraint under most trying conditions. Her words of quite undeserved self-reproach are overheard by the drowsy Geraint who misinterprets them, thinking they constitute an admission that she is 'weeping for some gay knight in Arthur's hall' (MG 118). Tennyson highlighted this misunderstanding, possibly he overemphasized it, by changing her words from those she uses in the Mabinogion. There he overhears her saying, 'Alas, and am I the cause that these arms and this breast have lost their glory and the warlike fame which they once so richly enjoyed!'²⁵ Tennyson's Geraint hears her groan, 'O me, I fear that I am no true wife!' (MG 108). His unfounded suspicion springs from his disapproval of her intimacy with Guinevere whom he has already pre-judged on account of certain rumours regarding her affection for Lancelot. This close link with the theme of Sense versus Soul is evidence of the structural and thematic unity of the Idylls, especially when it is noted that the theme is developed further in the two following idylls, 'Balin and Balan' and 'Merlin and Vivien'.

Tennyson quite definitely attributes Geraint's blindness and consequent taking 'true for false' to his selfishness and unreasonable expectations of others. His demand that Enid

wear her 'faded silk' (MG 762) is made not only because of his presumptuous vow that the Queen 'should make your Enid burst/Sunlike from cloud' (MG 788-9) but primarily so that 'no reason given her' (MG 807) she will humiliate herself and appear before the Queen in shabby dress simply in order to please her future husband. Tennyson, therefore, has Geraint conclude this ridiculously self-centred speech with words that, taken in retrospect, will prove the shallowness of his own character:

Now, therefore, I do rest,
A prophet certain of my prophecy,
That never shadow of mistrust can cross
Between us (MG 813-16).

The theme of misapprehension is such an important one that Tennyson, in his only deus ex machina intervention in the Idylls of the King introduces 'Geraint and Enid' as follows:

O purblind race of miserable men,
How many among us at this very hour
Do forge a life-long trouble for ourselves,
By taking true for false, or false for true;
Here, through the feeble twilight of this world
Groping, how many, until we pass and reach
That other, where we see as we are seen! (GE 1-7)

Although these lines are a commentary on the Geraint - Enid idylls in particular, they are also an incisive interpretation of the whole poem as well. Poston, for example, notes that "the 'purblind race' of Arthur's men grapple (sic) in the last battle where friend cannot distinguish foe; and symbolic twilight, a hindrance of man's spiritual perception, casts a shadow over the later books."²⁶ There are many more instances of this taking of true for false, or vice versa, in the Idylls. Arthur himself is, initially, not recognized as king for his enemies deny his kinship to Uther and even Guinevere, expecting to see

the trappings of kingship in her future husband,

...saw him not, or marked not, if she saw,
One among many, though his face was bare (CA 53-4).

It is significant that Tennyson writes 'though his face was bare' and not 'because his face was bare'. This implies that Guinevere can be expected to recognize the kingship of Arthur precisely because there is no earthy impediment to block her vision. She does not because, as the personification of Sense, she is blind to the light of the Ideal, of Soul, and receptive only to the outward trappings of knightly glory. This is even reflected in her unselfish promise to Geraint that, should he decide to marry, she 'will clothe her (his wife) for her bridals like the sun' (MG 231).

Iynette, by allowing herself to be deceived by outward appearances, also confuses true and false, and cannot see the true knight in the 'scullion' (GL 956) who can pardon a vanquished knight and send him to Arthur's hall to 'crave/ His pardon for thy breaking of his laws' (GL 961-2). Gareth, on the other hand, even though he cannot see the face of his victorious opponent, accepts his unhorsing with laughter because he has felt the 'touch/ Of that skilled spear' (GL 1191-2). Tennyson seems to be pointing out that an unselfish personality will see things as they are, in true perspective, not like Geraint who is only too prepared to take true for false.

Buckley points out, however, that Geraint 'at least escapes the darker delusion of imputing truth to falsehood. As Arthur's Order advances in time, however, the fair appearance more and more frequently glosses over the evil reality, and the young

knights who accept the fairness at face value meet an increasingly bitter delusion'.²⁷ This is what happens to the unfortunate Balin and to many others. After the springtime of the early idylls the more serious problems of Arthur's Order become more apparent. Balin reveres Guinevere's crown upon his shield and, after his initial madness, blames himself for imputing base motives to Guinevere's meeting with Lancelot. He is ashamed of his lack of faith in her integrity and, when he escapes from Pellam's court, feels morally bound to forego the privilege of bearing her cognizance:

'I have shamed thee so that now thou shamest me,
Thee will I bear no more' (BB 425-6).

In this regard Johnson draws attention to the tragedy attendant on misrepresentation in 'Balin and Balan' when he notes:

A more tragic version of this conflict occurs in 'Balin and Balan' which comes next after the Geraint and Enid story in the final ordering of the Idylls although, significantly, it was the last of all to be written. The structure of the poem adroitly reinforces the irony of the central situation. Balin becomes Guinevere's knight as a means of averting further attacks of insanity; yet it is the disillusionment resultant on what Sir Garlon and Vivien tell him about the Queen's clandestine life that plunges him back into his final fatal derangement.²⁸

Tennyson has the imagery match this 'more tragic' mood, for even though the Balin episode occurs in the summer of King Arthur's reign when knightly qualities are still at their peak, at times the music in Balin 'seemed to change, and grow/ Faint and far-off (BB 213-4). At such times 'all the kindly warmth of Arthur's hall/ Shadowed an angry distance' (BB 231-2) and in spite of Balin's honest attempts to control his savage nature he cannot maintain his equilibrium after seeing Guinevere and Lancelot meet in very dubious circumstances. But the tragedy that 'plunges him back into his final fatal derangement' is not

the fact that he takes true for the truth, i.e. accepts the situation as it is, or that he takes true for false, i.e. convinces himself that there is an innocent explanation for the circumstances of the meeting. It is rather that he takes false for true in believing the rumours, the malicious lies of Sir Garlon and Vivien. The deliberate manipulation of evidence by Sense has destroyed the knighthood of Balin who has just begun to 'move/ To music' (BB 73-4) with the Order and his King and, therefore, misrepresentation has won another victory for Sense over Soul.

Gradually, as Tennyson develops this theme, misrepresentation begins to undermine both personal and the communal integrity of the Round Table. Vivien deliberately pretends an affection which she does not feel in order to have Merlin betray his principles and be 'lost to life and use and name and fame' (MV 212). Merlin eventually surrenders the secret charm, symbolic of Soul, because he allows himself to be blinded to the truth, and is immediately confined in the hollow oak of Sense and 'lost to life and use and name and fame' (MV 968). In this instance the physical principle utilizes misrepresentation in order to confound the spiritual. In 'The Holy Grail' it is a spiritual consideration that blinds the knights to the responsibilities of their vows and causes them to misinterpret their role in the Grail quest. Besides being of great structural importance in the history of the Round Table, 'The Holy Grail' also includes many of Tennyson's most profound observations on the theme of the true and the false, of reality and appearance. Although it seems feasible that the nun may

have seen the Grail, it is difficult to accept the knights' reasons for embarking on the Grail quest as logical ones. Percivale's unbalanced fervour: 'I swear a vow before them all' (HG 195) and Lancelot's sense of guilt after Elaine's death are typical of the non-spiritual motivations for the Quest. Tennyson, although he may not approve of it, can countenance the withdrawal of the nun and of Galahad from the physical world in order to give full expression to their spiritual nature. He has Arthur say to Galahad that 'for such/ As thou art is the vision, not for these' (HG 293-4). For the others the Grail is a misrepresentation, 'an over-indulgence of man's spiritual nature as harmful in its way as the sensuality for which Vivien stands'.²⁹ Arthur warns his knights that they will follow 'wandering fires' (HG 319) and, when he recalls these words on the return of a small remnant of the knights after the Grail quest, he condemns their having broken their vows in order to undergo a new mystical experience. His belief is that spiritual visions will exist in truth for him who, having not wandered from 'the allotted field' (HG 904) of duty and social responsibility,

...knows himself no vision to himself,
Nor the high God a vision, nor that One
Who rose again (HG 913-5).

Guinevere's reaction to the mob-like enthusiasm of the knights when they set off on the misguided quest is a far more personal and earthy one. She sees their unbalanced interpretation of the Grail vision as a madness that 'has come upon us for our sins' (HG 357), and it is ironic that it was precisely the sin of Guinevere that caused a recurrence of Balin's madness which led to the death of the true brothers.

Once this stage has been reached there can be no stability in the Order. Thus it is that Pelleas is 'abashed' (PE 74) by the beauty of Ettarre's 'flesh', and, when finally disillusioned, founds his anti-order in the North. Nothing is as it seems any longer and, at the last tournament, Lancelot 'saw the laws of the tournament/ Broken, but spake not' (LT 160-1). Sir Tristram, a leading knight, shows no respect for his vows, while Dagonet, the King's fool, is the only true exponent of the ideals of the Order.

Perhaps the most effective presentation of this theme occurs in 'Lancelot and Elaine' with Lancelot's wearing Elaine's 'sleeve of scarlet' (LE 601) at the diamond jousts in order to hide his true identity. Besides nearly causing his death, this misrepresentation has Arthur hope that Lancelot is in love with some 'gentle maiden' (LE 602). It drives Guinevere almost to madness, however, and she 'flung herself/ Down on the great King's couch, and writhed upon it' (LE 605-6). Her jealousy later causes her to throw the diamonds, presented to her by Lancelot, out of the window where they fall into the river just in front of the barge

Whereon the lily maid of Astolat
Lay smiling, like a star in blackest night (LE 1234-5).

The sudden appearance of the dead Elaine makes a mockery of Guinevere's last words: 'she shall not have them' (LE 1225), and in this way Tennyson stresses that things are not what they seem. The colour imagery expressed and implied - scarlet, pearls, lily maid, blackest night - parallels the theme of opposites, of true and false which, at this stage, suggests the undermining of Arthur's kingdom. Integrity and idealism seem to have

vanished, causing Arthur to reflect mournfully:

Oh 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?
 Or else as if the world were wholly fair,
 But that these eyes of men are dense and dim,
 And have not power to see it as it is' (PA 13-20).

The theme of misrepresentation is often interwoven with the theme of Sense versus Soul but the paradox of the adultery of Lancelot and Guinevere is that "it not only 'mars' them (and the kingdom) but ultimately ennobles them (and the kingdom), as Tennyson emphasizes by contrast with another adulterous triangle—the guiltless, peculiarly modern and joyless affair of Tristram and Isolt."³⁰ Both Guinevere and Lancelot change subtly from being major exponents of Sense and achieve a dignity and nobility which ultimately show them to be the finest result of Arthur's endeavours to found God's kingdom among men.

Although, then, the theme of the true and the false recurs continually throughout the Idylls, it is seen most distinctly, and by way of antithesis in the four women: Enid, Vivien, Elaine and Guinevere, and the episodes in which they are involved. In the 1859 'Idylls of the King' this theme was emphasized by means of the title of an earlier edition, viz. 'Enid and Nimue: The True and the False'. But in the final poem of 1886 the antithesis is stressed by the structurally opposing positions of the idylls 'Merlin and Vivien' and 'Guinevere' as shown by my diagram on page 146, and by the first seven lines of 'Geraint and Enid'. It is also interesting to note that in my 'Wheel of Fortune' diagram of the Idylls, 'Lancelot and Elaine'

faces the Geraint idylls in the cyclical structuring. Tennyson appears to be saying that appearances can be most deceptive 'for there is nothing in it as it seems' (GL 260). Vivien is able to deceive even the wisest of men; Guinevere is ultimately most representative of 'the true'; Elaine, 'the lily maid' is prepared to sacrifice her virtue for Lancelot's love, and Enid's unrealistic goodness is reflected in Tennyson's uncharacteristically puerile lines which he uses to conclude her history:

But Enid, whom her ladies loved to call
Enid the Fair, a grateful people named
Enid the Good (GE 961-3).

The Ideal and the Actual

The first and last idylls of the series comprise a structural and, to a certain extent, a thematic framework for the ten central 'Round Table' idylls, but Tennyson suggested another thematic framework in his 'Dedication' and 'To the Queen' appendages to the Idylls. In the first he wrote that 'my king's ideal knight/ ...reverenced his conscience as his king' (6-7) and in the second that the Idylls retells an old, imperfect tale of 'Ideal manhood closed in real man' (38). Although the concept of idealism or ideality is inextricably connected with the theme of Sense versus Soul, there is another thematic aspect implied here, namely that of the ideal and the actual. As Rosenberg states:

The Idylls of the King is not only explicitly and constantly about the hazards of mistaking illusion for reality, it dramatically enacts those dangers, ensnaring the reader in the same delusions that maim and destroy its characters. Nothing in the poem is as it seems, and nothing seems to be what it is.³¹

In 'De Profundis' Tennyson sees God as 'Infinite Ideality' and 'Immeasurable Reality' (58-9) but in the Idylls of the King he

sees the Godhead represented by 'ideal manhood clothed in real man' (To the Queen, 38). His own struggle to reconcile the concepts of ideality and reality are mirrored by the difficulty that the people in the Idylls have to avoid confusing the ideal and the actual. Most of them seem to be leading a dual existence with every positive achievement, every action having, to quote Rosenberg, 'its imaginative counterpart through the instrumentality of dream, madness, vision, and the quest (48). All supernatural portents in the Idylls can, as Tennyson points out, be explained in purely realistic terms but, nevertheless, the feeling of the supernatural remains. This conflict between the actual and the ideal generally results (both in the Idylls and in Tennyson's last poem, 'The Dreamer') in the confirmation of a pessimistic view of life. In this last poem he returns to the problem of the ideal and the actual:

I am losing the vision of my youth
 And the Vision that led me of old,
 And I clash with an Iron Truth,
 When I make for an Age of gold (4-7).

The futility of the dreamer's attempt to maintain the ideal seems to cause despondency: 'And I would that my race were run' (8), but he does envisage that human suffering will become 'sphere-music' (29) so there is good reason to 'follow the sun' (32). Unfortunately, as the kingdom of Arthur becomes more corrupt, the knights cannot see 'the harp of Arthur' up in heaven and it is only the faithful Dagonet who can say,

'I see it and hear.
 It makes a silent music up in heaven,
 And I, and Arthur and the angels hear' (LT 348-50).

Tristram, who is representative of those who discount the ideal, cannot see the star or hear the silent music, and his end is symbolic of the bitterness of life on earth for those who are

not infused with belief in the ideal.

The theme of the actual and the ideal is traced by Tennyson through 'dream, madness, vision and the quest'. Certain other considerations, for example, allegory, magic and song, give clearer definition to the theme and will also be discussed in the following pages. The cyclic quality of the imagery and structure of the Idylls repeats itself in vision and song when the knights, 'rose, knighted from kneeling ...half blinded at the coming of a light' (CA 262-5). Then, after Arthur's marriage they confirm their vows of fealty to the King in a song of joy, accepting that Arthur is representative of God and that they must order their lives in full obedience to his wishes:

'Strike for the King and live! his knights have heard
That God has told the King a secret word.

...

The King is King, and ever wills the highest (CA 487-8 and 494).

Tennyson presents here the relationship between the ideal and the actual. Arthur, the ideal, is anointed by God, and the vocation of the knights is to serve him personally and achieve God's will in this way. Their calling, though moral, is a secular one as they must 'strike for the King and live'. But this ideal becomes confused when Percivale's sister in the 'white walls' (HG 119) of her cell sees 'a cold and silver beam' (HG 116) presaging the arrival of the Holy Grail 'rose-red with beatings in it, as if alive' (HG 118). Soon afterwards the fired imaginations of the Knights enable them to see the vision 'all over covered with a luminous cloud' (HG 189) and they forget their vows to Arthur. Only disaster can follow for they have thereby betrayed their trust. As Arthur said to Lancelot at the

beginning of the Order: 'Man's word is God in man' (CA 132), and a spiritual quest that presupposes the breaking of this 'word' must inevitably lead to destruction and tragedy.

Tennyson points this out by showing that the knights' vision of the Grail is devoid of the life of the Nun's experience when the beatings on the Grail were 'as if alive' (HG 118). Their vision is sterile for they are as 'dumb men' (HG 193), taking their inspiration from one another and not from Arthur. At this moment Arthur is returning to Camelot and, seeing the 'thunder-smoke' (HG 220) above Merlin's hall he has a premonition that it will 'on the sudden vanish, wrapt/ In unremorseful folds of rolling fire' (HG 260-1). When he hears about their vow to seek the Holy Grail he is sad; not only, like Malory's Arthur, because he knows that many will not return, but especially because he foresees in the breaking of their vows the destruction of his Order. By following 'wandering fires' they will destroy the ideal and cause a reversal to the 'waste land, where no one comes,/ Or hath come, since the making of the world' (PA 370-1).

Arthur's knights are destined for the third level symbolized by Merlin's sculpures, viz. to be 'warriors, perfect men' (HG 236), but now all of them aspire to the fourth, viz. 'men with growing wings' (HG 237). This is reserved only for the occasional person, like Galahad, who is given a special vocation which exempts him from normal social responsibility and clothes him 'in silver-shining armour starry-clear' (HG 511) as a knight of the 'spiritual city' (HG 526). Galahad is, however, not the ideal of Arthur's Order; in fact the principles which he

embodies, praiseworthy though they are, are inimical to the structure of Arthur's Table. Arthur does not blame him, but he points out that his knights are not Galahads, not even Percivales, and their task is to be 'warriors, perfect men' not 'men with growing wings'.

The irony of the whole situation is that whereas the spirituality and mysticism, i.e. the ideal, of Arthur's Order raised men from the level of 'wolf-like men/ Worse than the wolves' (CA 32-3), it is an excess of spirituality and mysticism in his knights, i.e. the actual, that so undermined the Order that Arthur is left

...gazing at a barren board,
And a lean Order - scarce returned a tithe (HG 889-90).

The ideal is often shown in dream situations in the Idylls and Arthur's divinely appointed kingship is confirmed in this way when King Leodogran

Doubted, and drowsed, nodded and slept, and saw,
Dreaming ...a phantom king,
Now looming, and now lost, ...
Till with a wink his dream was changed, the haze
Descended, and the solid earth became
As nothing, but the King stood out in heaven,
Crowned (CA 426-43).

The clear light of Arthur's civilization cannot be obscured by the haze which at first threatens to envelop it even though seekers like Leodogran are temporarily withheld from it by the scoffers and opponents who deny Arthur's kingship. His dream resembles the doubts of many at the beginning of Arthur's ascendancy but the poet shows that the rightness of Arthur's cause is so obvious that even the reality of earth falls into nothingness beside it. Consequently, Leodogran becomes convinced of Arthur's kingship and willingly accepts him as a

divinely appointed king. In similar manner, Arthur's knights, at this early stage, see him stand 'out in heaven,/ Crowned' and the unity of the Round Table is perfect. The ideal has united with the actual in fulfilling the aims of the king. But the symbolic clearing of the haze in Leodogran's dream is reversed when, in Arthur's last dream at Lyonnesse, the ghost of Gawain appears and his voice seems to mingle with dim cries 'far in some moonlight haze among the hills' (PA 42). Gawain's 'Hollow, hollow all delight' (PA 33) effectively summarizes the destruction of Arthur's social ideal, a new order which would reform the world. The two dreams are cyclical, not circular, in structure and theme inasmuch as Arthur's fortunes, having progressed from nothingness, through power, to nothing again, do not however settle at their initial level. He is now given the assurance that 'there is an isle of rest for thee' (PA 35) and the repetition of the 'haze' imagery suggests that although defeat is imminent, the 'moonlit haze' will at some future time vanish, and the king will once again stand out 'in heaven/ Crowned'.

Both these dreams emphasize the ideal, the divinely appointed kingship of Arthur. Tennyson normally, however, uses cyclic imagery and symbolism to effect contrasts of sets of dualities and thereby clarify particular themes. This occurs here as well. Engbretsen has argued that the 'core' of the Idylls of the King is compounded of 'The Coming of Arthur', 'The Holy Grail', and 'The Passing of Arthur'.³² I would add to this core 'The Last Tournament' as it is in this idyll that the tragic collapse of the Round Table becomes a fact. Although 'The Holy Grail' does not incorporate any dreams, it has a number of

episodes which reveal 'dreamlike' qualities. The first is Percivale's account of his search for the Grail, when neither the gratification of sensual appetite, nor wifely love and the love of the family brings any content. No sooner does he experience either than as he reports, it 'Fell into dust, and I was left alone' (HG 419). When, however, he is able to lose himself in order to save himself and is able to put off the actual for the ideal he sees the Holy Grail and is 'glad that no phantom vext me more' (HG 538). The earthiness of Percivale's phantoms is silhouetted clearly against the spirituality of Arthur's dreams. But it is Tristram's dream in 'The Last Tournament' that affords a particularly striking contrast to Leodogran's and Arthur's dreams in the framing idylls. While Arthur is riding to attack the Red Knight, Tristram dreams his 'red dream' (LT 486):

He seemed to pace the strand of Brittain
 Between Isolt of Britain and his bride,
 And showed them both the ruby-chain, and both
 Began to struggle for it, till his Queen
 Graspt it so hard, that all her hand was red.
 Then cried the Breton, 'Look, her hand is red!
 These be no rubies, this is frozen blood,
 And melts within her hand - her hand is hot
 With ill desires, but this I gave thee, look,
 Is all as cool and white as any flower' (LT 406-15).

The tone of this dream, reinforced by the 'red' imagery of 'ruby', 'red' and 'frozen blood', is that of selfishness, passion, and destruction. In clear contrast to this is the ideality of the dreams in the framing idylls which are typified by an almost complete absence of colour imagery. The conflict between the ideal and the actual appears in these four idylls. The ideal appears among men and seems to be conquered by the reality of worldliness but is ultimately victorious, albeit in a different manner to that suggested by Tennyson at first.

Wilson sums this up as follows:

If we see the work as a circle - a round table as it were - in which each part is the same as every other part, then we can see that there is a basic, formal, symbolic, and thematic unity among these parts. For the 'Idylls' as an artistic unit is like a set of variations upon a theme, and although symbolized in different terms, the theme is always the same. It permeates the imagery, characterization, and the narrative of each separate idyll in sets of dualities according to the development of Tennyson's mind, e.g. the actual and the ideal'.³³

The theme of the ideal as opposed to the actual is, therefore a uniting feature of the Idylls which relates closely to the cyclical structure of the whole poem and appears in the polarity of the idylls which face each other in the graphical representation of this structuring. In the four³⁴ idylls 'Gareth and Lynette' to 'Merlin and Vivien' the ideal is shown as a major force even though it is sometimes, as in the last of the four, reduced to a state of defeat. Gareth's striving to realize Arthur's aims contrasts positively with Pelleas's nihilism; Geraint's repentance represents a triumph of the ideal whereas Lancelot's inability to love Elaine causes her to deny her moral standards; Balin's disillusionment is the result of seeing his ideals distorted and shamed, but Tristram's cynicism is sordid and is the result of his deliberate rebuttal of the ideal; and finally, Merlin's defeat occurs only because Vivien knows that, as the spiritual centre of Arthur's kingdom, Merlin must be overcome or else the ideal will triumph. Guinevere's repentance comes too late to save the Order: she has chosen the actual throughout and turned aside from the ideal, and her subsequent 'good deeds and her pure life' (G 687) avail for her personal salvation but not for the salvation of the Order.

Unity versus Disruption

This is another theme which Tennyson has linked very closely with cyclical imagery and the structure and design of the various idylls. Adicks states this very succinctly as follows:

The poet constantly keeps before the reader the disparity between the orderly universe and a chaotic world fumbling to duplicate macrocosmic order by means of social and political institutions.³⁵

In fact, as stated on page 177, the Idylls of the King may be seen as Tennyson's pessimistic estimate of man's lack of success in establishing social and political institutions which will guarantee progress towards the Ideal. Instead of guaranteeing the development of 'warriors, perfect men' or 'men with growing wings' (HG 236-7) humanity 'reels back into the beast' (PA 26). Indicative of this failure is, particularly, the animal or beast imagery which, as already noted, is intrinsic to the structure of the Idylls. But the attempt to establish unity in human institutions in a praiseworthy one and Arthur's failure to realize the Ideal simply repeats the eternal failure of Man to overcome completely human weaknesses. A limited measure of success is indicated by the 'three metaphors of harmony: stars, music and marriage' ³⁶ which occur regularly in the Idylls. Arthur's ideal is not an ascetic one of rejection of normal human relationships but an ideal which foresees the sublimation of such relationships in the service of society. Arthur knows that if he is to achieve lasting harmony on earth it must be initiated in marriage:

...for saving I be joined
To her that is the fairest under heaven,
I seem as nothing in the mighty world (CA 84-6).

His aim regarding the unification and uplifting of a world in which 'wolf-like men' (CA 32) hold sway is to create an

enlightened society as he desires to

Have power on this dark land to lighten it,
And power on this dead world to make it live (CA 92-3).

In this extract, (CA 73-99), the star symbolism indicates a major transformation in Arthur. Before he achieves peace of mind regarding his marriage, the stars 'shudder' over him, but once his decision is made he can see 'even in high day the morning star'. Significantly, when the disruption of the Order has gained momentum, Tristram, who is disloyal to his Isolt, cannot see this same star. At Arthur's marriage the knights sing in harmony and the accompanying trumpet peal settles down to the gentler harmony of Arthur's city which 'is built/ To music' (GL 372-3). As such a city is never completed 'and therefore built forever' (GL 274), Tennyson implies that man's pursuit of the ideal and of unity can never end and, conversely, can never be completely thwarted. Tennyson sometimes employs 'star' imagery to express a spiritual unity and achievement, as when Percivale sees Galahad 'like a silver star' (HG 517) and then, after seeing 'the least of little stars' (HG 524), is given his vision of the Holy Grail: 'and from the star there shot/ A rose-red sparkle to the city' (HG 529-30).

At the beginning of the Idylls all of Arthur's knights are imbued with an idealism which ensures harmony and unity. Then Lancelot and Tristram violate their vows and contribute to the corruption of Arthur's court. Ultimately, as Litzinger declares, 'The young knights in their savagery are simply the logical extensions of the degradation of Arthur's chief knights'.³⁷ From a peal of trumpets, Arthur's music becomes 'a silent music up in heaven' (LT 349) which seems to indicate that Tennyson, in

spite of the failure of Arthur's chief knights to uphold their vows, nevertheless believes that the silent music of the spheres will remain for those who, like Dagonet, are prepared to listen. The disruption of the social order is due to human weakness and not to divine plan, even though the Grail quest is symbolic of a pursuit of impossible spiritual ideals which necessarily come into conflict with Arthur's aims. Litzinger remarks quite correctly that

If the overall effect of 'The Last Tournament' is one of tragic gloom, perhaps it merely reflects the mature Tennyson's sobering judgment: man's idealism may be doomed to failure, but the failure is never absolute.³⁸

Tennyson traditionally employs marriage as a symbol of unity and it is significant, that marriages occur only in the first four idylls. These marriages represent the Springtime of the Order but after this fourth idyll, 'Geraint and Enid', the values of married life are whittled away. When Tristram's marriage is referred to, it is as a hollow relationship which even at the beginning was not founded on mutual love. Tennyson shows that the various influences which disrupt stable family life and a stable society are courtly love (Lancelot), sexuality (Vivien and Ettarre), unbalanced spirituality (Pellam) and asceticism (the Grail quest). This upsetting of the order of married life reaches its climax when Guinevere flees the court and Arthur reproaches her:

Well it is that no child is born of thee.
The children born of thee are sword and fire,
Red ruin and the breaking up of laws (G 421-3).

Although the Idylls of the King is the story of the birth, growth and decline of a new Order, paradoxically the only child born in the series does not pass through the same extended cycle.

Tennyson subtly forecasts Arthur's final defeat in battle in his account of the tiny Nestling whose 'being smitten in mid heaven with mortal cold' (LT 27) may be recalled when Arthur is 'so deeply smitten through the helm' (PA 193) while 'a deathwhite mist slept over sand and sea' (PA 95). Even more significant perhaps is Tennyson's observation that Guinevere, when she came to love the infant, Nestling, 'so forgot herself/ A moment, and her cares' (LT 25-6). For a short while Guinevere is at peace with herself and it may be wondered whether Tennyson is implying that a return to a healthy family life is the best means of ensuring the greatest possible degree of unity on earth.

The theme of unity versus disruption is further reflected by the structure of the Idylls itself. The involved structure of 'The Coming of Arthur' with the dream of Leodogran at the centre suggests the cyclical whirl of creation leading to some kind of natural order and growth. The land of Cameliard 'was waste/ Thick with wet woods' (CA 20-1) until Arthur brought the light of Christianity and idealism, felling 'the forest, letting in the sun' (CA 60). Other kings before Arthur tried to achieve the same ends but failed because a philosophy, an Order, was lacking. But Arthur

...through the puissance of his Table Round,
Drew all their petty princedoms under him,
Their king and head, and made a realm, and reigned (CA 17-19)

The next three idylls, in spite of indications that perfect unity cannot be achieved on earth, demonstrate the unity and stability of Arthur's Order and, therefore, display a relatively straightforward narrative structure. From 'Balin and Balan' on, however, the internal structure of the separate idylls becomes more involved, sometimes appearing confused, and thereby

mirroring the ever increasing confusion in the social order.

Ryals states this as follows:

The reason for the increasing complication in form of the idylls constituting 'The Round Table' is, I believe, that this complexity symbolizes the frustration of Arthur in working his will and fulfilling his ideals. What we find, especially in 'The Holy Grail' and 'The Last Tournament', is the decay of the King's order indicated by the 'broken music' of the narrative flow. The tensions emanating from the guilt, emotional dependency and failure of the principal actors in these idylls are thus embodied in the very structure of the poem.³⁹

As has already been pointed out in Chapter Two, critical opinion has always admired Tennyson's 'fine ear' which results in 'many brilliant passages, many splendid descriptions, many fine fragments of language'.⁴⁰ In this subordinate theme of Unity versus Disruption, the poet has succeeded in maintaining a balanced cyclical structure and, at the same time, he has designed this structure to appear disrupted in order to symbolize 'the frustration of Arthur in working his will and fulfilling his ideals'. His brilliant passages are as much in evidence as ever with the 'broken music' symbol reinforcing the structure on the one hand and expressing the theme on the other. Overall it achieves, as B.S.Lee notes, 'for a work spread over so many years, a remarkable consistency of tone'.⁴¹

The Loss of Personal Integrity

A fifth theme which is a most important offshoot of the theme of progression and regression, of construction and fragmentation, is that of the loss of personal integrity. As Culler unequivocally states, 'The Power of the word is central to the Idylls'⁴² Arthur's knights affirm that God has told him 'a secret word' (CA 488) and has breathed into him 'a secret thing' (CA 500). It is on this account that he can bind them 'by so strait vows

to his own self' (CA 261). Arthur proclaims his belief in the word, in the integrity of man's assurances, when he tells Lancelot that he accepts his 'deathless love' and seals this with his bond:

Man's word is God in man:
Let chance what will, I trust thee to the death (CA 132-3).

Whether the 'word' is kept in its full integrity or not in the remaining idylls forms the focal point of much of the theme of the poem. Any deception, even when practised for seemingly acceptable reasons, is shown to be contrary to Arthur's standards for he 'cannot brook the shadow of any lie' (GL 287). But Tennyson, in accordance with the clearly symbolized seasonal structure of his poem, has the reader accept that the knights do indeed display a remarkably homogeneous integrity of character at the beginning of the Order, in the springtime of the first idylls. Consequently, as the disruption of this integrity begins to take place and then gains in momentum, it is traced thematically not in terms of the initial 'word' but in terms of the loss of an established 'name and fame'. From insignificant beginnings which lead into the theme of misrepresentation, as when Geraint takes heed of the rumours when 'the Queen's fair name was breathed upon' (GE 950) this theme takes on major proportions when Merlin, the artificer of Arthur's hall and Order, lies as dead in the hollow oak, 'lost to life and use and name and fame' (MV 968). Even here the cyclicity of this theme is being stressed as it was Merlin who warned Gareth against the 'shadow of any lie' but who now betrays his own integrity in submitting to Vivien's sensual wiles. The total cyclicity of the 'word-name' symbolism as allied to the theme of the loss of integrity

may be seen by a comparison of Arthur's words to Lancelot in 'The Coming of Arthur' with Pelleas's answer when Lancelot asks him his name:

No name, no name, ...a scourge am I
 To lash the treasons of the Table Round.
 ...I have many names, ...
 I am wrath and shame and hate and evil fame (PE 553-6).

It may seem strange that 'The Last Tournament' which, most of all the idylls, has the loss of personal integrity as its dominant theme, does not specifically use this 'name' imagery. This is because the flashback in 'Guinevere' is, in fact, chronologically within the time span of the previous idyll, and this theme is pertinently noted there. Guinevere

...half-foresaw that he [Modred], the subtle beast,
 Would track her guilt until he found, and hers
 Would be for evermore a name of scorn (G 58-60).

Throughout 'The Last Tournament' Tennyson points out the almost total annihilation of honour and personal integrity that has taken place within the Order. Guinevere, Lancelot, Tristram and the rank and file with the exception of Dagonet who can still hear Arthur's 'silent music', are all infected. Love has become lust and Arthur's idealism has become 'Mark's way' (LT 748). Even Arthur's voice which, as Culler points out, "is so potent in 'The Coming of Arthur' that it can both set the heathen flying and stop the battle instantly, has entirely lost its authority in 'The Last Tournament'".⁴³ Arthur's optimism regarding the attainment of the ideal is beginning to diminish as, after his fears that his realm will 'reel back into the beast, and be no more' (LT 125) he is forced to stand by while his knights

...slimed themselves:
 Nor heard the King for their own cries (LT 470-1).

His erstwhile hyper-acute power of vision, symbolic of his visionary knowledge of the ideal, once enabled him to see

The smallest rock far on the faintest hill,
And even in high day the morning star (CA 98-9).

Gradually this clarity of vision weakens and Arthur, disillusioned when his knights break their vows to him, tell them that 'visions of the night or of the day' (HG 906) should be encouraged only after a man's work on earth has been done. Eventually he must ask Bedivere, the last of his knights whose integrity has remained intact, to help him

...find or feel a way
Through this blind haze (PA 75-6).

The final irony is that Bedivere twice attempts to deceive Arthur and that Arthur, who once could not 'brook the shadow of any lie', is prepared to accept that

...a man may fail in duty twice,
And the third time may prosper (PA 297-8).

This admission is, in itself, proof of the changing of the 'old order' (PA 408) for earlier, when Gawain made 'courtesy' the excuse for modifying his interpretation of Arthur's command:

The seldom-frowning King frowned, and replied,
'Too courteous truly! ye shall go no more
On quest of mine, seeing that ye forget
Obedience is the courtesy due to kings' (LE 710-3).

As personal integrity is clearly the basic requirement for an orderly human society, its loss must necessarily lead to the disruption of social harmony. Once his followers lose their 'use and name and fame' (MV 302) Arthur becomes less effective and, as has just been pointed out, is forced to set and accept standards of behaviour far below those ideals on which he founded his Order. In Chapter Two the 'name' motif was discussed with particular reference to Guinevere, Lancelot, Merlin, Pelleas and Tristram. These five most truly represent the

society founded by Arthur, but they are also instrumental in its dissolution as it is their loss of personal integrity that undermines the structure of Arthur's Order causing it to yield to the 'boundless deep' (MV 111) of worldliness and cynicism. They create in microcosm the world of Camelot and fundamental defects in them are like

...the little rift within the lute,
That by and by will make the music mute,
And ever sidening slowly silence all (MV 388-90).

Each 'little rift', each falling away in personal integrity of one of these five, strikes at the root of Arthur's very being as they are, as it were, the extensions of his ideality in actual form. This may be seen from the important role which Tennyson has them play in the warp and woof of Arthur's life.

Arthur initially entertained high hopes that his marriage to Guinevere would result in their 'reigning with one will in everything' (CA 91) and would give them

...power on this dark land to lighten it,
And power on this dead world to make it live (CA 92-3).

He was confident, then, in announcing that

The old order changeth, yielding place to new (CA 508)

because his confidence was founded on the secure knowledge that he could rely on the complete integrity and support of his wife and his knights. But Guinevere was to negate this confidence and, as a necessary consequence, be instrumental in the destruction of the fabric of Arthur's Order. The implications of 'the great Queen's bower was dark' (LT 752) destroy Arthur's hopes of ever lightening the 'dark land' and cause him to cry out:

'The children born of thee are sword and fire,
Red ruin, and the breaking up of laws' (G 422-3).

Arthur's faith in man receives its most serious blow when he realizes that Sir Lancelot, 'my right arm,/ The mightiest of my knights' (G 426-7) has been untrue to his word. At the beginning of the Order Arthur expressed his fundamental faith in the integrity of man when, on the field of battle, he sealed a vow of 'deathless love' by saying to Lancelot:

'Man's word is God in man;
Let chance what will, I trust thee to the death' (CA 132-3).

Although he must have witnessed many of the incidents which gave rise to the rumour which 'rose about the Queen,/ Touching her guilty love for Lancelot' (MG 24-5), his faith in their integrity, in their 'word', would not allow him to harbour any 'shadow of mistrust' (GE 248). It is Arthur's own integrity of being that blinds him to the lack of integrity in his wife and his greatest friend and ultimately causes him 'to be king among the dead' (PA 449).

But although Arthur's ideals must be realized in the actual, they are founded on the ideal. Here it is Merlin, the spiritual principle of the Idylls, who initially sustains Arthur but who ultimately serves as an example of the inevitable spiritual disintegration that must follow the loss of personal integrity. Merlin, who 'through his craft ...had Arthur crowned' (CA 233-5), warns Gareth that Arthur cannot 'brook the shadow of any lie' (GL 286) but is himself unable to maintain standards of probity and trust. The 'charm' (MV 964), which may be taken to symbolize the mysticism of the Order, is yielded up to the sensuousness of Vivien and

...in one moment, she put forth the charm
Of woven paces and of waving hands,
And in the hollow oak he lay as dead,
And lost to life and use and name and fame (MV 965-8).

The fall of Merlin deprives Arthur of the one adviser who could have helped him to curb the incipient weakening of the Order. Vivien's success in destroying the Seër's integrity represents a major victory for Sense.

Pelleas and Tristram symbolize the new growth and the old wood of Arthur's knighthood. By the time that Pelleas is knighted the Grail quest had decimated Arthur's followers and the King 'made new knights to fill the gap' (PE 1). The integrity of character that seems to infuse the new knight: '...and the sunshine came along with him' (PE 6), proves to be very brittle when the disillusionment caused by Gawain's treachery leads Pelleas to hatred of the ideals of the Order. But it is the unworthy behaviour of his knights in sliming themselves and massacring women in the court of the Red Knight that calls forth the statement that 'in the heart of Arthur pain was lord' (LT 485). Tristram's complete loss of faith in Arthur's ideals is even more serious in its effects than Pelleas' rebellion, as it typifies the moral collapse which causes the knights to slime and defile themselves. His rationalization of his adulterous behaviour - 'the vow that binds too strictly snaps itself' (LT 652) and 'crowned warrant had we for the crowning sin' (LT 572) - typifies the endemic loss of integrity that has begun to characterize the knights. As Arthur later says to Guinevere, the example set by those who should have been examples of integrity and truth is the major cause of the destruction of his Order:

'Then came thy shameful sin with Lancelot;
 Then came the sin of Tristram and Isolt;
 Then others, following these my mightiest knights,
 And drawing foul ensample from fair names,
 Sinned also, till the loathsome opposite

Of all my heart had destined did obtain,
And all through thee!' (G 484-90)

The unifying function of this theme acts in two ways. Firstly, it traces a clear narrative progression from the time of the establishment of Arthur's ideals and the embodiment of this idealism in a human society or order through to the final dissolution of this social order in the climactic dénouement of *Lyonnesse*. Secondly, it reinforces the other subordinate themes of the *Idylls*, supplying a logical and a psychological framework for the growth and decline of Arthurian idealism.

Conclusion

In the introduction to this chapter I stated that 'the antithetical concepts of the Ideal being at one with the Actual, while also being threatened by it, are fundamental to any thematic interpretation of the poem'. Priestley makes a similar statement:

Tennyson is asserting through the *Idylls* the primacy of the Unseen, the ultimate reality of the spiritual, which is manifested in a constant succession of phenomena, and gives permanent meaning to them. The phenomena are not merely shadows or illusions; they are 'real' in that they are the temporal actualization of the ideal. ...Man's proper task is that of securing order and harmony in all phases of human activity. ...The threats to order come from within and without. ...These have success only against those already weakened internally.⁴⁴

For his contemporaries Tennyson's message is fundamentally pessimistic: as a 'temporal actualization of the ideal' his generation has failed, as Arthur's Order failed, to realize the 'ultimate reality of the spiritual'. Tennyson is saying that the materialism of the nineteenth century is revealing the weak underside of man - the victory of Sense, his succumbing to misrepresentation, the predominance of the actual over the ideal,

his loss of personal integrity and a prevailing tone of disruption which will ultimately lead to a climactic reversion to the bestial. But if this pessimistic message is meant to serve as a warning, it also contains the belief that 'the Creed of Creeds must be worked out by human hands'.⁴⁵ In spite of the setbacks and chaos which follow man's repeated attempts to establish a perfect social order, there will be

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

All the themes that may be traced throughout the Idylls coalesce into one, viz. that the endeavours of man to establish a perfect social order display a cyclicity of progression and regression, of construction and fragmentation which is inevitable but which can maintain longer success if the lessons of past failures are learned. As Tennyson himself said of the Idylls:

The whole is the dream of man coming into practical life and ruined by one sin. Birth is a mystery and death is a mystery, and in the midst lies the tableland of life, and its struggles and performances. It is not the history of one man or of one generation but of a whole cycle of generations (HT p.443).

It is important to note that the Idylls of the King is not an epic history of King Arthur. It is a parabolic representation of a realistic society, come like Arthur 'from the sea to stand for a while on the strands of time and, finally, to pass on to another body of water leading to the sea'.⁴⁶ The ephemeral quality of this 'tableland' is emphasized when the 'narrative structure of the idylls becomes increasingly complex as the kingdom disintegrates'.⁴⁷ The disintegration of the kingdom, mirrored by the disintegration in poetic structure, is an essential framework for the thematic message of the Idylls of the King.

CONCLUSION

'...vanish into light' (PA 468)

Chapters One to Four of this thesis dealt with Tennyson's handling of his sources and his cyclical treatment of the Arthurian material through a discussion of imagery, structure and theme. There has been some unavoidable overlapping of the basic component of one chapter into each of the others, but the aim has been to keep the four discussions as discrete as possible. This Conclusion, however, in combining the arguments of the thesis, will postulate the overriding unity of the Idylls of the King by investigating the role of Song in the poem. This will entail a synthesis of the way imagery, structure and theme each contributes to the coherence and impact of the Idylls.

Although all twelve idylls contain references to song, it is important to note that formal songs occur in nine only. Whether by accident or design the three 'songless' idylls, viz. 'Geraint and Enid', 'The Holy Grail', 'The Passing of Arthur', divide the series into three groups of three idylls each. These groups are (i) from 'The Coming of Arthur' to 'The Marriage of Geraint', (ii) from 'Balin and Balan' to 'Lancelot and Elaine', and (iii) from 'Pelleas and Ettarre' to 'Guinevere'. Within each group the songs repeatedly point to the inevitable advent of disruption and change but, in addition, also mirror the current position of the fortunes of the Round Table. There is a

recurrent cyclicity of imagery within the song motif which 'like shot silk with many glancing colours' (HT 443) reflects the more important aspects of theme at any specific moment. The three 'songless' idylls link sets which approximate the seasonal groupings already pointed out in previous chapters. The central position of 'The Holy Grail' in these three idylls indicates the important role which the Quest plays in stilling effectively the music of Arthur's city. Clearly, the structural framework suggested when Song is made the point of departure is different from other possible unifying structures already noted, but can only strengthen the premise that the Idylls displays considerable artistic unity.

'Few devices in Tennyson's Idylls are better organised and more cyclic than the songs',¹ as one appreciates even in the first song of the Idylls, that of Merlin to Bellicent.

'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 (CA 402-10).

As Gray points out, the main image of the rainbow is analogous to a 'broken utterance insofar as it is but half round'.² The transitoriness of beauty, and therefore of human social ordering and harmony is stressed, but the song has a more specific relevance too. Merlin unwittingly prophesies against himself, as his own wits are soon to wander when he will allow himself to be deluded by the wiles of Vivien. This is ironic for he warns Bellicent that truth may be cloaked in various guises and that man cannot rely on himself to differentiate between the true

and the false. Indeed Arthur, much later, confirms Merlin's view when he observes to the few Grail knights who achieved some measure of success: 'And as ye saw it ye have spoken truth' (HG 876). The last line of Merlin's triplet: 'From the great deep to the great deep he goes', displays remarkable structural aptness as a frame to Arthur's coming and passing. This is presumably why Tennyson, calling it, 'the weird rhyme' (PA 444), repeats it in the final idyll. Such intentional additions to the earlier 'Morte d'Arthur' both enhance the coherence of the theme and indicate an overall unity of structure. In this way the following lines from 'Gareth and Lynette' gain additional relevance from Merlin's song in 'The Coming of Arthur' and reinforce the main theme of disruption and confusion in the whole poem. There Merlin quotes to Gareth the Riddling of the Bards:

'Confusion, and illusion, and relation,
Elusion, and occasion, and evasion' (GL 281-2).

Contrasted with Merlin's pessimistic song to Bellicent, is the optimism of the song (CA 481-501) of Arthur's knights which seems to affirm the belief that truth is ascertainable provided it is looked for in the King and not in personal visions, for 'God hath told the King a secret word' (CA 488). Their faith in Arthur is borne out by their successes in battle while they were 'all one will' (CA 515) with the King but, conversely, also by their failure in the Quest, when they mistakenly follow Percivale, 'the leader's bell' (HG 298). As Arthur rebukes them:

'Taliessin is our fullest throat of song,
And one hath sung and all the dumb will sing' (HG 300-1).

Arthur's, and Tennyson's, use of song as the symbol of

encroaching disruption and the collapse of the 'city built to music' is highly significant in the light of the customary use of music in the Idylls to indicate harmony and growth. Lynette's song (GL 971, 974-6, 1034-6, 1040-2, 1049-51, 1130-2), spaced as it is between lines 971 and 1132 of the second idyll, is partly a commentary on the action of the idyll and partly a continuation of the cyclic structure of the whole poem. It continues the rainbow motif of Merlin's song:

'O trefoil, sparkling on the rainy plain,
 O rainbow with three colours after rain,
 Shine sweetly: thrice my love hath smiled on me' (GL 1130-2).

Besides this, its star imagery³ links the 'sun' of the knights' song in 'The Coming of Arthur' with the star 'we call the harp of Arthur up in heaven' (LT 333). Even more importantly, it leads on to Tristram's bitter comparison: 'A star in heaven, a star within the mere' (LT 726), and warns that even the highest may be reduced to the lowest.

The last song in the first group of idylls is Enid's Wheel of Fortune melody (MG 347-58). Its optimistic message is, unfortunately, based on a false premise, viz. 'For man is man and master of his fate' (MG 355). It is precisely this erroneous assumption that will eventually lead to the dissolution of the Round Table, for it is by presuming to be 'lords of our own hands' (MG 356) that the knights swear a vow to follow the quest and, as a result, follow 'wandering fires' (HG 319).

Common to the songs of the first three idylls is the cyclic image of the weather as life-giving and beautiful, a framing device for the songs to follow.

'Geraint and Enid,' being the story of Geraint's unfounded suspicions of the blameless Enid and containing, too, the moment of Arthur's realization that he has 'let foul wrong stagnate and be', (GE 890) is songless. The Wheel of Fortune has come to a momentary pause at the apex of its cycle.

In 'Balin and Balan' the cyclic imagery of fire and dust (supersedes the rainbow in Vivien's hedonistic song (BB 434-9). The 'fire of heaven' is not a Christian motif and, consequently,

...the wholesome music of the wood
Was dumb'd by one from out the hall of Mark (BB 430-1).

Grey remarks, "Just as other songs have epitomised patterns running as themes or motifs throughout their respective poems so Vivien's does here. ...The confusion or subversion is complete when Vivien adds after the song what she means by heaven:

'...This fire of Heaven,
This old sun-worship, boy, will rise again,
And beat the cross to earth, and break the King
And all his Table' (BB 450-3)."⁴

Vivien's next song, (MV 385-96, 444-7, 458), is a repetition of one sung by Lancelot and, because it mimics the intense love of Arthur's leading knight, has an almost hypnotic effect on Merlin. The old Seër, nevertheless manages to retain his hold on his 'slowly ebbing, name and fame' (MV 435), so Vivien adds her own verse to the song, thereby introducing the concept of Shame which so typifies this idyll:

And shame, could shame be thine, that shame were mine
(MV 446).

Spiritual disruption now becomes the agent which 'will make the music mute' (MV 389) because Merlin, the spiritual principle of the Idylls, eventually yields to her entreaties ...

Then, in one moment, she put forth the charm
 Of woven paces and of waving hands,⁵
 And in the hollow oak he lay as dead,
 And lost to life and use and name and fame (MV 965-8).

Merlin has failed them. The knights, in Arthur's absence, will not be able to make the correct decision (in 'The Holy Grail') and, as a result, Vivien's words seem ominously prescient in foretelling the trials that Christianity will undergo:

This old sun-worship ...will rise again,
 And beat the cross to earth, and break the King
 And all his Table (BB 451-3).

Tennyson's Idylls nevertheless indicates that, in spite of the assaults of paganism, the 'old sun-worship' will not have the ultimate victory. Arthur, who has already overcome 'the heathen hordes' (CA 518), breaks the pagan 'yet once more on Badon hill' (LE 279) and, although his knights have lost their pristine virtue and integrity, he defeats the anti-Christian forces of the Red Knight (LT 457-85). On the other hand, the Christian 'fire' of religious fervour proves disastrous for many of the knights who, forgetting their vows to serve their king, 'follow wandering fires' (HG 598).

In the next idyll Elaine sings her own funeral dirge, (LE 1000-11, 1019). Pathetically, Elaine is forced to realize that, although she has no experience of love or death, she has to choose one of them. As she cannot obtain Lancelot's love, the choice of death is forced upon her and the redness of the fire imagery of Vivien's song is recalled in the climactic ending of her song, 'The Song of Love and Death':

...the blood-red light of dawn
 Flared on her face, she shrilling, 'Let me die! (LE 1018-9).

This second group in the trilogy of song-idylls builds up to the climax of 'The Holy Grail', an idyll which has no songs but which contains many references to music. Arthur's bitter comment that 'one hath sung and all the dumb will sing' (HG 301) certainly suggests that song need not indicate harmony and growth but can cause disruption and decay. Lancelot's memories of Elaine's clear song seem to sustain him in his quest, but the solemn chanting:

'Glory and joy and honour to our Lord
And to the Holy Vessel of the Grail' (HG 836-7).

leads him on to madness and a realization that 'the Quest was not for me' (HG 849).

The Wheel of Fortune is well on its downward course when Pelleas' song, 'A worm within the rose' (PE 391-400), reminiscent of the 'little pitted speck in garnered fruit' (MV 392), reiterates the Idylls' ever increasing emphasis on death:

He dies who loves it, - if the worm be there (PE 400).

The main image within this song is the 'rose', and this image assumes added significance when Pelleas approaches Ettarre's pavilions where the garden displays 'roses white and red' (PE 413) and the rivulet spills itself 'among the roses' (PE 418). It does not come as a surprise, then, when Pelleas, in the next idyll, employs the colour 'red' in his pseudonym as the Red Knight.

It is in 'The Last Tournament', however, that Tennyson mainly employs 'song' for its unifying qualities with regard to diction, structure and theme. Tristram plays for Dagonet who refuses to dance to his music but remains motionless as he tells Tristram that, by committing adultery, he has broken 'Arthur's music' (LT 266). Then Tristram sings:

'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'

(LT 275-81).

The cyclical music image, already traced through the Idylls, now combines with the seasonal imagery of autumn: 'the woods are hushed ...the leaf is dead' which is often used in this idyll beginning with, '...the yellowing woods...' (LT 3). Even the structural design of the two songs in 'The Last Tournament' indicates the lengthening of the wintery darkness and gloom as the three and four line stanzas of the earlier songs make way for the five line stanza of Pelleas' gloomy lament and the seven and eight line stanzas of Tristram's songs. Tristram's second song has particularly close links with common cyclical motifs and images of the Idylls. He sings to Isolt:

'Ay, ay, O ay - the winds that bend the brier!
 A star in heaven, a star within the mere!
 Ay, ay, O ay - a star was my desire,
 And one was far apart, and one was near:
 Ay, ay, O ay, - the winds that bow the grass!
 And one was water and one star was fire,
 And one will ever shine and one will pass.
 Ay, ay, O ay - the winds that move the mere' (LT 725-32).

'Brier' recalls Pelleas' 'rose within the thorns'; the 'star' does not allow one to ignore Tristram's earlier denial of 'the harp of Arthur'; 'water' is a major motif in the songs of Merlin and Lynette; and 'fire' calls to mind Vivien's heathen symbol, 'the fire of Heaven' (BB 450), but is a representation of his fierce love for the Irish Isolt rather than a symbol of sun-worship. The whole song is in essence an extended metaphor, symbolic of Tristram's earlier emotional struggle and now offered as a triumphant paeon to his 'Isolt of Britain' (LT 407).

But the irony of the song is unnoticed by Tristram who imagines that he is 'master of his fate' (MG 355). He thinks that his love for Isolt of Britain, the star that is fire, 'will ever shine' but, just as he kisses her jewelled throat,

Behind him rose a shadow and a shriek -
 'Mark's way,' said Mark, and clove him through the brain
(LT 747-8).

Not even temporal pleasures will escape the disruption which is the main theme of the Idylls.

The last song⁶ of the Idylls occurs in 'Guinevere', (G 166-77), and its actual date of composition - 8 March 1858 - is noted by Hallam Tennyson. Winter has come, 'and dark the night and chill' (G 166) and repentance can no longer undo the damage caused by Guinevere's sin. The inevitability of disruption suggested by the songs of Vivien, Pelleas and Tristram is now strikingly verified in the words of the 'little novice' (G 229). The poet reverts to the simpler structure of three-line stanzas - perhaps reflecting the simplicity of the singer - as if to indicate that the wheel has almost come full circle and that all that remains is the symbolic destruction of the Round Table.

This destruction takes place in 'The Passing of Arthur', not with formal song in the way that the Order was inaugurated, but immediately after

...the ghost of Gawain blown
 Along a wandering wind, and past his ear
 Went shrilling, 'Hollow, hollow all delight' (PA 31-3).

Arthur is borne to Avalon on a barge, which

...like some full-breasted swan
 That, fluting a wild carol ere her death,
 Ruffles her pure cold plume, and takes the flood
 With swarthy webs (PA 434-7).

It is at this moment that Bedivere recalls a line from the first song of the Idylls, viz. Merlin's account of Arthur's coming: 'From the great deep to the great deep he goes' (CA 410, PA 445). The perfect cyclicity of this image is typical of the perfect functional balance of the total design of Song in the Idylls. As Gray says, 'Nothing is more subtle in that subtle pattern of the Idylls than its exquisite cycle and chain of song'.⁷

As has been shown in the previous chapters, this unity of imagery, structure and theme is a striking characteristic of the Idylls and many critics, e.g. Ryals (From the Great Deep), Rosenberg (The Fall of Camelot), Buckley ('A City Built to Music') and Engelberg ('The Beast Image in the Idylls') recognize this. Too much of the negative criticism in the past has been caused by Tennyson's own vacillation in the definition of his purposes with the poem. This has led critics to censure it for not reflecting what they considered to be his major aim in writing it. Perhaps had Tennyson remained silent about his purposes much of this criticism would not have been voiced. But such statements as the following could be tested against the total effect of the poem and the poem was invariably found to be wanting:

My meaning in the Idylls of the King was spiritual. I took the legendary stories of the Round Table as illustrations. I intended Arthur to represent the Ideal Soul of Man coming into contact with the warring elements of the flesh (HT 443).

Had he rather left the poem to the independent judgment of critics, who know that 'poetry is like shot-silk with many glancing colours' (HT 443), then the doubts expressed in the first paragraph of the following assessment would, possibly, not have occurred:

We admire the skill with which he modernised Malory, turning magic into psychology and rambling narrative into organized rhetoric. His was perhaps the latest possible attempt to rehandle the Arthurian legend seriously. But whereas Malory was still working within a living tradition, Tennyson was trying to revive for didactic purposes a tradition which lives only for the imagination. And can the will listen to moral instruction while the imagination is suspending disbelief in the same material, and delighting in its fiction?

But as one reads the Idylls, and sees how carefully Tennyson has transformed the romance that most fascinated him throughout his life, it is the poetic and intellectual energy, and the structural skill, of what is after all one of the most considerable artistic achievements of the Victorian age, that one notices and enjoys.⁸

Criticism of the Idylls should focus on what the poem is, viz. an Arthuriad. As such it is undoubtedly successful. Tennyson's characters are living people: the flighty Gawain, the marred but admirable Lancelot, the vital Guinevere, and the idealistic but eventually disillusioned Arthur. The story flashes, like the diamonds which the Queen flings into the stream, with 'deep felicities'⁹ and there is a 'co-existence and interplay'¹⁰ of themes which has stimulated critical discussion for over a century.

This thesis does not attempt to prove the impossible, viz. that the Idylls is a perfect work of art. But it is certainly intended as a refutation of the criticisms that the Idylls is 'utterly wanting in unity, and coherence of structure ...and meaning'¹¹ and that 'for narrative Tennyson had no gift at all'.¹² Priestley's claim that the Idylls is a 'dramatic parable of enormous variety, richness, and complexity'¹³ may or may not be justified. What is certain is that, like Malory's flawed but wonderful Morte Darthur, Tennyson's Idylls of the King must

stand out 'in heaven/ Crowned' (CA 442-3) as one of the literary milestones in the Arthurian tradition. This being so, the reservations expressed by critics 'are morning shadows huger than the shapes/ That cast them' (To the Queen 63-4) and, like Arthur, will go 'from less to less and vanish into light' (PA 468).

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13. Loomis, p.191.
14. Loomis, p. 295.
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18. Vinaver, pp.153 and 29. Vinaver suggests that, as most of the extant manuscripts of the Vulgate cycle belong to the fifteenth century, it seems likely that Malory's French source was not more than a century older than the Morte Darthur.
19. J. Douglas Bruce, ed., Le Morte Arthur (London: Oxford University Press, 1930), p.105. [Early English Text Society, Extra Series 88, 1930].

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20. Sir Thomas Malory, Le Morte Darthur (1868; rpt. London: Macmillan, 1907), p.480. [Edited, with Introduction by Sir Edward Strachey].

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Two editions of Malory's Morte Darthur appeared in 1816 and although neither had any particular merit in its editing, they were probably the ones that stimulated the youthful Tennyson's interest in the history of Arthur. Hallam Tennyson writes (Memoir I p.156): 'This copy of Malory I have still in my possession, a small book for the pocket, published 1816 by Walker and Edwards, and much used by my father'. Unfortunately the 1816 editions are inaccessible to me, so I have used the Globe edition, first printed in 1868, which would also have been accessible to Tennyson. As all editions of Malory, prior to the discovery of the Winchester Manuscript in 1934, followed Caxton's text with only minor alterations, there can be little difference between the 1816 text of Walker and Edwards and the 1868 Globe text which was reprinted on many occasions between 1868 and 1907.

In the rest of this thesis all references to Malory's Morte Darthur will be to the 1907 Macmillan (Globe) edition with an introduction by Sir Edward Strachey. The book and chapter details of the Morte Darthur will be

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noted at the end of the quotation and will be followed by the page reference for the 1907 edition, e.g. (Malory XXI, v, p.480).

21. Loomis, p.491.
22. Finlayson, p.8.
23. Vinaver, p.29.
24. Larry D. Benson, Malory's 'Morte Darthur' (Cambridge, Massachussets: Harvard University Press, 1977), p.12.
25. D. S. Brewer, The 'Morte Darthur', Parts Seven and Eight (London: Edward Arnold, 1968), p.7.
26. Ryals, From the Great Deep, p.179.

Chapter One

1. Hallam Tennyson, Alfred Lord Tennyson: A Memoir (London: Macmillan, 1906), II, p.128.
2. Hallam Tennyson, Memoir, I, p.91.
3. Isobel Armstrong, Victorian Scrutinies: Reviews of Poetry 1830-1870 (London: The Athlone Press, 1972), pp.135-41; [rpt. John Stirling, Quarterly Review, lxx, September 1842, 385-416].
4. Charles Tennyson, 'The Idylls of the King', Twentieth Century (March 1957), 277.

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5. Hallam Tennyson, Memoir, II, pp. 122-5.
6. The two 'framing' idylls use similar imagery and support, to some degree, Tennyson's statement that he could have written his major Arthurian poem much earlier. In 'The Coming of Arthur' (1869), Merlin tells Bellicent: 'From the great deep to the great deep he goes' (CA 410), and in 'The Passing of Arthur' (1869) Lyonesse is described as:

A land of old upheaven from the abyss
 By fire, to sink into the abyss again (PA 82-3).
7. Charles Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson (London: Macmillan, 1950), p.296.
8. Charles Tennyson, p.301.
9. Eggers, 'The Weeding of the Garden', p.46.
10. Eggers, p.50.
11. Guest, The Mabinogion, p.262.
12. Eggers, p.45.
13. B. S. Lee, 'Two Arthurian Tales', Studies in English I, University of Cape Town, February 1970, 3.
14. D. S. Brewer, The 'Morte Darthur': Parts Seven and Eight (London: Edward Arnold, 1968), p.3.
15. Christopher Ricks, ed., The Poems of Tennyson (London: Longmans, 1969), p.1756.

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16. Brewer, p.13.
17. Malory's fuller text appears in the Winchester manuscript, discovered in 1934, and printed in Eugene Vinaver, Malory: Works (1969; rpt. London: Oxford University Press, 1971). A brief comparison will illustrate how the 19th Century Morte Darthur deviated from Malory's original work:

Morte Darthur
(Globe edition)

Make ye no noise, said
the queen, for my
wounded knights lie here
fast by me....

And when he saw his time^{...}
that he might tarry no
longer....
(XIX, vi, p.443).

Morte Darthur
(Winchester MS)

'Make ye no noyse', seyde
the quene, 'for my wounded
knyghtes lye here fast by
me'. So, to passe uppon
thys tale, sir Launcelot
wente to bedde with the
quene, and toke no force of
hys hurte honde, but toke
hys plesaunce and hys
lykyng untyll hit was the
dawyng of the day; for wyte
you well he slept not but
wacched. And whan he saw hys
tyme that he myght tary no
lenger...

18. Sister Rosaline Salome, 'Tennyson's Idylls: The Relevance of a Chronology of Composition', Diss. Emory, 1968, p.74.
19. Sister Salome, p.10.
20. Vinaver, Malory, p.90.
21. Brewer, p.10.
22. Brewer, pp.10-11.
23. Helen McDonnell, et al., ed, England in Literature (Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman, 1979), p.361.

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24. Benson, p.50. Benson continues: 'Such omissions and redactions [from the Morte Arthur]; along with the consistent compression of speeches and the elimination of unnecessary episodes ...helps create a more simple narrative structure' (p.50).
25. Hallam Tennyson, Memoir, I, pp.456-7.
26. Benson, p.28.
27. This is worthy of note as Tennyson composed it in 1872 and, therefore, deliberately avoided such links.
28. Hallam Tennyson, ed., Idylls of the King, Annotated by Alfred Lord Tennyson (London: Macmillan, 1913), p.442. (Any future references to this work will be indicated in the text as, e.g. HT 442).
29. Ryals, From the Great Deep, p.51.
30. William Shakespeare, King Richard the Second, II i, 45-6.
31. Malory writes: And there had Arthur the first sight of Guinevere, the king's daughter of Cameliard, and ever after he loved her. And they were wedded, as it telleth in the book (I, xvi, p.41).
32. When Guinevere discovered that Lancelot had slept with Elaine 'she was nigh out of her wit, and then she writhed and weltered as a mad woman ... (XI, viii, p.332).

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33. Malory has, nevertheless, limited the excessive use of magic in his sources and gets more plausibly realistic as his story proceeds.
34. In the alliterative Morte Arthure and the stanzaic Morte Arthur Gawain is Arthur's chief knight. Malory has Lancelot take over this role. Tennyson reduces Gawain's part even further, making him an ineffectual type of anti-hero.
35. Malory XIII, vii, p.353.
36. Ricks, The Poems of Tennyson, p.586: In a note Ricks quotes the Heath MS, Fitzwilliam MS, as having between lines 13 and 14 of the 'Morte d'Arthur' the following lines which were deleted by Tennyson:
- ...So clear a dream-
Which I neglected with my waking mind-
Came yesternight - Sir Gawain as he lived-
Most like Sir Gawain in his eyes and hair.
Bare-headed, circled with a gracious light,
Seven ladies, like the seven rainy stars,
For whom he fought and whom he saved from shame-
Beautiful, tearful: and he spoke and said
'Go thou not forth tomorrow to the fight'.
37. Eugene Vinaver, The Works of Sir Thomas Malory (London: Oxford University Press, 1947), I, p.liv.
38. He also had Gareth marry Lynette, and not Lyonors as in Malory. This was done, possibly, in order to avoid lengthening the idyll any further. The underlying theme of the idyll is not prejudiced in any way.

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39. The final Chapters of XXI, (viii-xiii), deal with the holy deaths of Guinevere and Lancelot. Tennyson makes no mention of Lancelot's death.
40. Brewer, p.22
41. Benson, p.54.
42. Brewer, p.22.
43. Examples of this balance are the following:
- Who spake no slander, no, nor listened to it
(Dedication 9).
- So like a painted battle the war stood
Silenced, the living quiet as the dead (CA 121-2).
- They are building still, seeing the city is built
To music, therefore never built at all,
And therefore, built for ever. (GL 272-4).
- Forgetful of his promise to the King,
Forgetful of the falcon and the hunt,
Forgetful of the tilt and tournament,
Forgetful of his glory and his name,
Forgetful of his principedom and its cares (MG 50-4).
- Edyrn has done it, weeding all his heart
As I will weed this land before I go (GE 905-6).
- A walk of roses ran from door to door;
A walk of lilies crost it to the bower (BB 237-8).
44. Bagehot, 'Wordsworth, Tennyson and Browning or pure, ornate and grotesque art in English poetry', National Review, November 1884, 45.
45. Bagehot, p.46. 'Something else' is italicized in the original.

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46. William R. Brashear, The Living Will: A Study of Tennyson and Nineteenth Century Subjectivism (The Hague: Mouton and Co., 1969), p.153.
47. Brewer, p.10.
48. Hallam Tennyson, Memoir, I, pp.193-4.

Chapter Two

1. Paull F. Baum, Tennyson Sixty Years After (London: Archon Books, 1963), p.213.
2. J. M. Gray, Tennyson's 'Idylls': Cyclic Imagery and Syntax, p.3.
3. Valerie Pitt, Tennyson Laureate (London: Barrie and Rockliffe, 1962), p.185.
4. Ryals, From the Great Deep, p.172.
5. Buckley, Tennyson: The Growth of a Poet, p.172.
6. Hugh I'Anson Fausset, Tennyson: A Modern Portrait, p.260.
7. Buckley, Tennyson: The Growth of a Poet, p.173.
8. Ryals, From the Great Deep, p.48.
9. Tennyson's reference to 'midnight in midwinter' is not from 'The Passing of Arthur' but from the opening line of his last poem 'The Dreamer' (1892). In 'The Passing of Arthur', however, he wrote that Arthur's last battle

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occurred

...there, that day when the great light of heaven
Burned at his lowest in the rolling year. (PA 90-1).

These lines were not in the 'Morte d'Arthur' of 1842.

10. I have underlined words from the text of the Idylls of the King for the purpose of emphasis. Should I italicize words from any other source I shall note this source each time.
11. Philip L. Elliott, 'Imagery and Unity in the Idylls of the King', Furman Studies, May 1968, .23. Elliott notes that the 'sun', as image or noun, appears twenty-eight times in the first three idylls as compared with twenty-four times in the other nine. This signifies the greater initial power of Arthur and the gradual waning of his influence.
12. Ryals, From the Great Deep, p.56
13. Buckley, Tennyson: The Growth of a Poet, p.173.
14. As it is only in 'Balin and Balan' that this dichotomy is illustrated so specifically, it may be deduced that Tennyson did this deliberately. This idyll, composed in 1872 and published in 1885, was to link many of the themes touched on in the 1859 and 1869 groups of idylls. The cyclic nature of this image may also be seen in 'Lancelot and Elaine', 'Merlin and Vivien', and 'Pelleas and Ettarre', and its main purpose is to contrast Sense and Soul.

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15. These are: 'Have I beheld a lily like yourself?' (GE 619) and 'And all Lent-lily in hue' (GL 889).
16. There are only two references to 'rose' in the remaining idylls, viz. 'O'er the four rivers the first roses blew' (GE 763), and 'Redder than any rose, a joy to me' (HG 521).
17. The importance of colour as a symbol appears even in the 'Dedication' where Prince Albert is 'wearing the white flower of a blameless life' (Dedication, 24).
18. Edward Engelberg, 'The Beast Image in Tennyson's Idylls of the King', English Literary History, 22 (1955), 287.
19. 'I marked him in the flowering of the fields,
But in His ways with men I find him not' (PA 10-11).
- There is an interesting contrast here between the use of the present and past tenses. Arthur's faith in God is referred to in the past tense: 'marked Him', but his disillusionment is in the present tense: 'I find him not'. Furthermore, he declares that his realm 'reels back into the beast', thereby signifying his acceptance that his city will be destroyed. It existed when it was 'built/
To music' (GL 272-3), but now that the music of harmonious obedience to vows has disappeared, it must disintegrate.
20. J. M. Gray, Tennyson's Doppelgänger: 'Balin and Balan', p.15.

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21. Engelberg, p.290.
22. Tennyson's imagery usually portrays Vivien as a serpent, e.g. 'And lissome Vivien, holding by his heel, ...clung like a snake' (MV 235-40). But although it is Merlin who is defeated, it is Vivien who pretends to be the victim, calling herself 'a gilded summer fly/ Caught in the great old tyrant spider's web' (MV 256-7).
23. ' 'Is the King true?' 'The King!' said Percivale.
'Why then let men couple at once with wolves.
What! art thou mad?' (PE 525-7).
24. These two lines are part of a flashback (G 21-60) which treats an earlier period in the history of the Round Table when all the Court, 'green-suited', had been 'a-maying'. From this time on, Modred's 'narrow foxy face' (G 62) is a constant reminder to Guinevere of her guilt, as she feels that Modred's 'gray persistent eye' (G 63) will inevitably discover her illicit relationship with Lancelot.
25. '...the solid earth became
As nothing, and the King Stood out in heaven
Crowned' (CA 441-3).
- These lines indicate the supremacy of Arthur's ideals over worldly standards at the inception of the Round Table.
26. Tennyson's balancing of the pagan and the Christian in the two descriptions of Guinevere merits special mention. He first names her: 'fairest of all flesh on earth', a very earthy description. Arthur, however, sees her as 'fairest under heaven'. The earth/heaven antithesis and Arthur's

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avoidance of 'flesh', emphasize the spiritual nature of love in Arthur's ideal society.

27. Gray notes: 'among names and identities Tennyson reworks are the association of Ulfias and Brastias with the wellknown Bedivere, Gorlois as in Spenser's spelling and Geoffrey of Monmouth's naming (Malory gives no name except Duke of Tintagel for the character), Arthur's supposed sister as Bellicent (Tennyson's improvement of a name, Belisent, found in a romance collection, not Malory or the histories), a petty king as Anguisant (from the same source), etc.' (J. M. Gray, Tennyson's 'Idylls': Cyclic Imagery and Syntax, p.18).
28. On his eightieth birthday Tennyson said, 'My meaning in the Idylls of the King was spiritual. I took the legendary stories of the Round Table as illustrations. I intended Arthur to represent the Ideal Soul of Man coming into contact with the warring elements of the flesh' (Hallam Tennyson, ed., Idylls of the King, p.443).
29. Gray remarks that this placing of 'the fullness of name applied to Lancelot ...in the central idyll reflects framing again when considered in reference to Arthur's name and establishment at beginning and end' (Gray, Tennyson's 'Idylls': Cyclic Imagery and Syntax, p.3). It certainly reflects Tennyson's ability to create 'roundness', whether such roundness be of structure or of imagery.

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30. This is the only reference to 'Table Round' - as opposed to 'Round Table' - in a negative context. Attention is thereby drawn to the fact that the ideals of the Round Table are being undermined by the increasing lack of integrity of the knights.
31. Gray, Tennyson's 'Idylls': Cyclic Imagery and Syntax, p.19.
32. This cyclic imagery adds considerably to the implications of the introduction to 'Enid' in 1859. When 'Enid' was composed in 1856, the line 'of that great Order of the Table Round' must have depended for its impact on the readers' Arthurian background from sources other than the Idylls. In the final ordering, however, the implications of 'Table Round', as developed in 'The Coming of Arthur' (1869) and 'Gareth and Lynette' (1872), are firmly established.
33. Although both 'Ulysses' and 'Morte d'Arthur' (which contains these same five lines quoted from 'The Passing of Arthur') were both composed in 1833, there is a striking difference in tone between the two. As opposed to the pessimism of Bedivere, the sentiments of Ulysses radiate optimism:
- Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield
(Ulysses 69-70).
- Ulysses sees the end of a period of stagnation: Bedivere faces 'the dead world's winter dawn' (PA 442).

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34. Buckley, Tennyson: The Growth of a Poet, p.173.
35. Sister Salome, "Tennyson's Idylls : The Relevance of a Chronology of Composition", p.357.
36. Joan Aiken in her anthology of short stories: A Harp of Fishbones (London: Jonathan Cape, 1960), p.22, uses similar imagery: '...When Nerryn stopped playing at last, quite tired out, the music still went on. All day and all night, for thirty days, the music lasted, until the houses were rebuilt, the streets clean, and not a speck of frost remained in the city'.
37. Tennyson's choice of 'harp' as the musical instrument is important as it suggests preternatural qualities. This is shown to be a deliberate choice as 'harp' becomes an extended image in 'The Last Tournament', 332-58. Significantly, 'Gareth and Lynette' was composed a year after 'The Last Tournament'.
38. Gray notes in this regard: 'An obvious difficulty in any classification of Tennyson's language and imagery is a deliberate habit of his. This is the literal and metaphorical mixing of word uses, the second in a kind of band from near literal to ultra symbolic (Tennyson's 'Idylls': Cyclic Imagery and Syntax), p.3.
39. Although Dagonet does not mention Guinevere's adultery, the parallel is obvious. Furthermore, in the final battle, the first knightly chorus: 'Blow through the living world', is superseded by the cacophony of confusion and defeat:

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'moans of the dying, and voices of the dead' (PA 117).

40. In his last poem, 'The Dreamer', Tennyson wrote:

'For moans will have grown sphere-music
Or ever your race be run!
And all's well that ends well,
Whirl, and follow the Sun!' (29-32).

Tristram was not prepared to follow the sun, i.e. Arthur, and, therefore, could not appreciate the 'sphere-music'. Instead, the last sound he hears is the shriek of Mark at the moment he attempts to 'kiss the jewelled throat' (LT 745), symbol of his breaking of his vows.

41. Ryals, From the Great Deep, p.57 and p.67.

42. 'The Coming of Arthur', 'Gareth and Lynette', 'The Last Tournament', and 'The Passing of Arthur' together contain fifteen of the twenty-one references to 'water' in the Idylls of the King.

43. Tennyson notes: 'the Lady of the Lake in the old romances of Lancelot instructs him in the mysteries of the Christian faith' (Hallam Tennyson, ed., Idylls of the King, p.460). The imagery of the Idylls, however, imparts a distinctly pagan tone to the mystique of the Lady of the Lake who acts as a link between paganism and Christianity. This is perhaps best illustrated in lines 214-5 of 'Gareth and Lynette' where she is represented as follows:

But like the cross her great and goodly arms
Stretched under all the cornice and upheld.

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44. Malory here refers specifically to Lancelot's love of Guinevere, but, in Tennyson's context, this cannot be mentioned. In Malory XII, xx, p.36, we read:
- And then he told there that good man all his life,
and how he had loved a queen unmeasurably, and out
of measure long and never did I battle all
only for God's sake, but for to win worship, and
to cause me to be the better beloved, and little
or nought I thanked God for it.
45. Here again Tennyson's deliberate mixing of literal and metaphorical word uses is in evidence (Cf. Note 44).
46. Ryals, From the Great Deep, pp.63-4.
47. Ricks, Tennyson, p.274.
48. T. S. Eliot, 'In Memoriam', rpt. in John Killham (ed.), Critical Essays on the Poetry of Tennyson, p.210.

Chapter Three

1. F. E. L. Priestley, 'Tennyson's Idylls', rpt. John Killham, ed., Critical Essays on the Poetry of Tennyson, pp.239-40.
2. Paull F. Baum, Tennyson Sixty Years After, p.213.
3. The necklace referred to here is the one
- That burst in dancing, and the pearls were spilt
Some lost, some stolen, some as relics kept
(MV 450-1).
4. John D. Rosenberg, The Fall of Camelot, p.144.

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5. This is an accurate figure as the 'Morte d'Arthur' was published in 1842; the first 'Idylls of the King' in 1859, and the last idyll, 'Balin and Balan', in 1885.
6. G. and K. Tillotson, Mid-Victorian Studies (University of London: Athlone Press, 1965), p.80.
7. J. E. Hartmann, "The Manuscripts of Tennyson's 'Gareth and Lynette'", Harvard Library Bulletin, 13 (1959), 245 and 247.
8. David Staines, "The Prose Drafts of Tennyson's Idylls of the King ", Harvard Library Bulletin, XXII (July 1974), 293.
9. John Dixon Hunt, "The Poetry of Distance: Tennyson's Idylls of the King ", Victorian Poetry, Stratford-upon-Avon Studies 15 (1972), 95.
10. Although England was, by 1850, the most wealthy land in the world, the working class had no political power and the 1840s were times of such economic hardship that England very nearly faced a working-class revolution. The social instability of Victorian England affected its literature, and gradually the Keatsian revelling in the delight of pure imagination gave way to a strong sense of responsibility that came to pervade much of Victorian poetry, giving it 'an integrity missing from poetry that served only private ends' (Helen McDonnell et al., ed., England in Literature (Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foreman, 1979), p.361.

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11. Charles Tennyson, 'The Idylls of the King', Twentieth Century, (March 1957), p.283.
12. 'The Last Tournament' was written in 1871, 'Gareth and Lynette' in 1872, and 'Balin and Balan' in 1874.
13. Sister Salome, "Tennyson's Idylls : The Relevance of a Chronology of Composition", p.362.
14. In a note on lines 249-50 of 'Gareth and Lynette': 'I have seen the good ship sail/ Keel upward, and mast downwards in the heavens', Tennyson remarks laconically: 'Refraction by mirage'. (Hallam Tennyson, ed., Idylls of the King, p.460).
15. Rosenberg, The Fall of Camelot, p.22.
16. Sister Salome, "Tennyson's Idylls ", p.10.
17. J. E. Hartmann, "The Manuscripts of Tennyson's 'Gareth and Lynette'", Harvard Library Bulletin, 13 (1959), 251.
18. Nancy Martina Engbretsen, 'Tennyson's Longer Narrative Poems', p.263.
19. J. M. Gray, Tennyson's 'The Coming of Arthur'. (Lincoln: Tennyson Research Centre, 1969), pp. 3, 17-18.
20. The 'Morte d'Arthur' was written in 1833 and became lines 170-440 of 'The Passing of Arthur'. Stirling's unfavourable review of the 'fancy pieces' in the 1842 edition of Tennyson's poems caused the poet to discontinue

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his Arthurian project at that time.

21. Ricks (ed.), The Poems of Tennyson, p.1465.
22. Henry Alford, 'The Idylls of the King', The Contemporary Review, (January 1870), 106.
23. Charles Tennyson, in March 1957, wrote:

"Before the end of 1869 he was already finishing 'Gareth and Lynette', which he had begun some years before and now intended to place immediately after the 'Coming' in order to give a picture of the Round Table at its best before any suspicion of Guinevere's infidelity had arisen, and when this was finished he immediately started work on a story about Tristram and Isolt, in order to fill what he considered a gap between 'Pelleas and Ettarre' and 'Guinevere'".

('The Idylls of the King', Twentieth Century, 283).

Although his statement: 'and when this was finished...' does not agree with Hallam Tennyson's dating, the exact dates of composition do not affect my thesis and will not be discussed further.
24. In 'The Epic' which introduces the 'Morte d'Arthur' Frank declares that Hall burnt 'his epic, his King Arthur, some twelve books' (28). Hall's reply is that the twelve books 'were faint Homeric echoes, nothing worth' (39).
25. Although Tennyson divided the idyll in 1873, the separate titles were given only in 1888.
26. F. E. L. Priestley, Language and Structure in Tennyson's Poetry, p.126.

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27. John Philip Eggers, "The Golden Judgment: A Critical Study of the Idylls of the King in relation to its Mythical Background and Victorian Setting", Diss. Columbia 1968, p.195.
28. Henry Kozicki, 'Tennyson's Idylls of the King as Tragic Drama', Victorian Poetry, 4 (1966), 17.
29. I prefer the four part seasonal concept of the Idylls to Priestley's division into three acts of four idylls each, as the seasonal imagery in the Idylls seems to reflect Tennyson's predominant symbolism.
30. Kenneth Alan Robb, 'The Structure of Tennyson's Idylls of the King', Diss. Wisconsin 1966, p.99.
31. Priestley, Language and Structure in Tennyson's Poetry, p.135.
32. Robb, 'The Structure of Tennyson's Idylls of the King', p.259.
33. I have treated the two Geraint idylls as one for this is how Tennyson originally viewed them. He divided them (cf Note 25) mainly in order to achieve the total of twelve idylls.
34. Hugh Hamilton Wilson, 'The Evolution of Tennyson's Purposes in the Building of the Idylls of the King', Diss. Wisconsin 1965, p.495.

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35. Donald Smalley, ("A New Look at Tennyson-and especially at the Idylls ", Journal of English and Germanic Philology, Vol.61 (1962), 353-5) criticizes Buckley's assessment of the Idylls on three counts:

'Built to music' connotes a greater tightness of structure than Tennyson's Idylls of the King can really be judged to deliver ... disconcerting incongruities ... exist not only between the idylls but within the individual poems....Both poems [Princess and Idylls] show Tennyson's inability to construct and handle an effective narrative.

Smalley's arguments are more generalizations than specific textual refutations, and are, consequently, not discussed further here.

36. Buckley, Tennyson: The Growth of a Poet, p.173.
37. There is even an approximate chronological balance: the 1859 idylls appear in pairs; the three idylls of the 1870s (and one 1869 idyll) are grouped together; and the 1869 'The Coming of Arthur' and 'The Passing of Arthur' face each other. Together, this latter pair acts as a base for the 1869 'The Holy Grail' as well as being the frame for the ten idylls constituting the Round Table.
38. J. M. Gray, Tennyson's 'The Coming of Arthur', p.3.
39. Ricks (The Poems of Tennyson, p.1373) quotes Tennyson's words in introducing 'Demeter and Persephone': '...when I write an antique like this I must put it into a frame-something modern about it. It is no use giving a mere réchauffé of old legends'.

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40. Rosenberg, The Fall of Camelot, p.20.
41. Engbretsen, 'Tennyson's Longer Narrative Poems', p.258.
42. Clyde de l. Ryals, "Percivale, Ambrosius, and the Method of Narration in 'The Holy Grail'", Die Neueren Sprachen, 12 (1963), 533, 534, 539.
43. B. S. Lee, 'Two Arthurian Tales: What Tennyson did to Malory', Studies in English, University of Cape Town, 1 (February 1970), ?.
44. Ryals, From the Great Deep, p.179.
45. Robb, 'The Structure of Tennyson's Idylls of the King', p.58.
46. Rosenberg, The Fall of Camelot, pp.31-2.
47. Lawrence Poston, "The Arguments of the Geraint-Enid Books in Idylls of the King", Victorian Poetry 2 (1964), 270.
48. Poston, op.cit., p.274.
49. This deceit appears in his words to Guinevere:
 '...as to knights,
 Them surely can I silence with all ease.
 But now my loyal worship is allowed
 Of all men' (LE 108-11).
50. J. M. Gray, Tennyson's Doppelgänger: 'Balin and Balan', p.27.
51. Boyd Litzinger, "The Structure of Tennyson's 'The Last Tournament'", Victorian Poetry 1 (1963), p.58.

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52. Rosenberg, The Fall of Camelot, pp.33-4.
53. Robb, "The Structure of Tennyson's Idylls of the King", p.204.
54. Gray, Tennyson's Doppelgänger: 'Balin and Balan', p.9.
55. Boyd Litzinger, "The Structure of Tennyson's 'The Last Tournament'", 57 and 53.
56. Boyd Litzinger (op.cit., 59) observes, 'This last line, linking the mutual regrets of Arthur and his Queen, completes the parallel stories of the Tournament and the battle in the North. Together they illustrate the common theme of the poem, the death of chivalry. Having counterpointed one another throughout the poem, the two strains resolve at last in a note which sounds the pain of regret'.
57. Robb, 'The Structure of Tennyson's Idylls of the King', p.127.
58. In 1874 a new passage of approximately 150 lines (lines 6-150) was introduced into 'Merlin and Vivien'.
 [Morton Luce, A Handbook to the Works of Alfred Lord Tennyson (London: George Bell, 1906), p.322]
59. Ryals, From the Great Deep, p.93.

Notes to pages 176-180Chapter Four

1. Tennyson portrays Arthur as one not 'touched by the adulterous finger of a time/ That hovered between war and wantonness' ('To the Queen' 43-44) and this led Furnivall to criticize 'Guinevere': 'To anyone knowing his Malleore ...to come upon Arthur rehearsing to his prostrate queen his own nobleness and her disgrace, the revulsion of feeling was too great ...'. (La Queste del Saint Graal, Roxburghe Club, 1864, pp.vi-vii). Kathleen Tillotson suggests that it was because of such references to the incest episode that Tennyson made this disclaimer. (G. and K.Tillotson, Mid-Victorian Studies, p.98).
2. E. D. H. Johnson, The Alien Vision of Victorian Poetry (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1963), p.48.
3. R. R. Adicks, 'Structure and Meaning in Tennyson's Idylls of the King', Diss. Tulane 1965, p.69.
4. Eugene Vinaver, Malory (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929), p.90.
5. Ryals, From the Great Deep, p.93.
6. Sir Thomas Malory, Le Morte Darthur (1868; rpt. London: Macmillan, 1907), I, xv, p.41 and I, xvii, p.42. (Edited, with Introduction, by Sir Edward Strachey).

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7. Arthur was ignorant of their blood relationship: 'But all this time king Arthur knew not that king Lot's wife was his sister ' (I, xvii, p.42).
8. R. R. Adicks, 'Structure and Meaning in Tennyson's Idylls of the King', p.32.
9. Morton Luce, A Handbook to the Works of Alfred Lord Tennyson, p.329.
10. This theme was common in the Middle Ages, and Medwall's play 'Nature' is based on Lydgate's 'Reson and Sensuallyte'.
11. F. E. L. Priestley, 'Tennyson's Idylls', rpt. in John Killham, ed., Critical Essays on the Poetry of Tennyson, p.243.
12. A.Dwight Culler, The Poetry of Tennyson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), p.238.
13. Buckley, Tennyson: The Growth of a Poet, p.191.
14. E. D. H. Johnson, The Alien Vision of Victorian Poetry, p.50.
15. F. E. L. Priestley, op.cit., p.243.
16. Buckley, Tennyson: The Growth of a Poet, p.182.
17. Buckley, op.cit., p.177.
18. A.Dwight Culler, The Poetry of Tennyson, p.236.

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19. Malory IV, xxiii, p.94 reads: 'So the lady Ettard died for sorrow, and the damsel of the lake rejoiced Sir Pelleas, and loved together during their life days'.
20. Boyd Litzinger, "The Structure of Tennyson's 'The Last Tournament'", p.59.
21. The parallel between the Tristram - Isolt relationship and that of Lancelot and Guinevere is noticeable. Hallam Tennyson (HT p.504) records his father as saying:

Tristram had told his uncle Mark of the beauty of Isolt, when he saw her in Ireland, so Mark demanded her hand in marriage, which he obtained. Then Mark sent Tristram to fetch her as in my 'Idylls' Arthur sent Lancelot to Guinevere.
22. Betty Miller, 'Tennyson and the Sinful Queen', Twentieth Century (October 1955), 359.
23. F. E. L. Priestley, op. cit., p.250.
24. Lawrence Poston, 'The Argument of the Geraint-Enid Books in Idylls of the King', p.269.
25. Lady Charlotte Guest, The Mabinogion (1838; rpt. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1906), p.226.
26. Poston, op. cit., p.269.
27. Buckley, Tennyson: The Growth of a Poet, p.179.
28. Johnson, The Alien Vision of Victorian Poetry, pp. 49-50.
29. Johnson, op. cit., p.53.

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30. Rosenberg, The Fall of Camelot, p.23.
31. Rosenberg, op. cit., p.10.
32. Engbretsen, 'Tennyson's Longer Narrative Poems', p.263.
33. H. H. Wilson, 'The Evolution of Tennyson's Purposes in the Building of the Idylls of the King', p.495.
34. The two Geraint idylls are treated as one, as the division of 'Enid' was more a matter of convenience than of thematic necessity (cf. Ch.3 Note 33).
35. R. R. Adicks, 'Structure and Meaning in Tennyson's Idylls of the King', p.69.
36. R. R. Adicks, op. cit., p.70.
37. Boyd Litzinger, "The Structure of Tennyson's 'The Last Tournament'", p.59.
38. Litzinger, op. cit., p.60.
39. Ryals, From the Great Deep, p.93.
40. Paull F. Baum, Tennyson Sixty Years After, p.213.
41. B. S. Lee, 'Two Arthurian Tales', p.2.
42. A. Dwight Culler, The Poetry of Tennyson, p.236.
43. Culler, op. cit., p.237.
44. F. E. L. Priestley, op. cit., pp.251-2.

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45. F. E. L. Priestley, p.252.
46. Ryals, From the Great Deep, p.68.
47. Culler, The Poetry of Tennyson, p.240.

Conclusion

1. J. M. Gray, Serialism in the 'Idylls': Songs (Lincoln: Keyworth and Fry, 1974), p.3.
2. Gray, op. cit., p.6.
3. Lynette sings:
- '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'
(GL 974-6).
4. J. M. Gray, Serialism in the 'Idylls': Songs, pp. 10-11.
5. Ironically, the previous association of the dance motif with song is an affirmation of faith in the triumph of good over evil and is opposite in tone to Vivien's dance 'of woven paces and of weaving hands'. There we read that
- Lady Lyonors and her house, with dance
And revel and song, made merry over Death,
As being after all their foolish fears
And horrors only proven a blooming boy (GL 1387-90).
6. The novice's song is lines 166-77 of 'Guinevere'. It says much for Tennyson's continuing overall view of his Arthuriad that he could use one of his first songs (and idylls) so late in the narrative progression. This argues

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great conceptual unity of design and execution.

7. Gray, Serialism in the 'Idylls': Songs, p.20.
8. B. S. Lee, 'Two Arthurian Tales', p.15.
9. Ricks, Tennyson, p.276.
10. Ryals, From the Great Deep, p.200.
11. Baum, Tennyson Sixty Years After, p.213.
12. T. S. Eliot, 'In Memoriam' (1936; rpt. John Killham ed., Critical Essays on the Poetry of Tennyson, p.210.)
13. F. E. L. Priestley, Language and Structure in Tennyson's Poetry, p.136.

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