

1971

# Symbol and mood in Tennyson's nature poetry

Margery Moore Taylor

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarship.richmond.edu/masters-theses>



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Taylor, Margery Moore, "Symbol and mood in Tennyson's nature poetry" (1971). *Master's Theses*. 1335.  
<https://scholarship.richmond.edu/masters-theses/1335>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Research at UR Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of UR Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact [scholarshiprepository@richmond.edu](mailto:scholarshiprepository@richmond.edu).

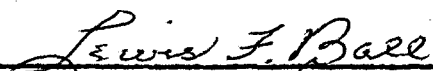
SYMBOL AND MOOD  
IN TENNYSON'S NATURE POETRY

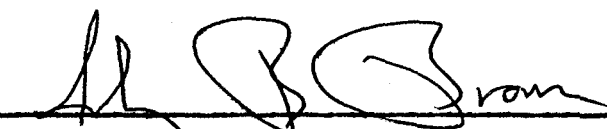
BY  
MARGERY MOORE TAYLOR

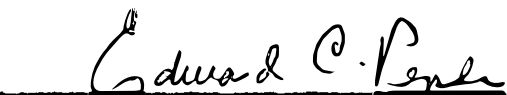
A THESIS  
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY  
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND  
IN CANDIDACY  
FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS

JUNE, 1971

Approved for the Department of English and the Graduate  
School by:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Director of Thesis

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Chairman of the Department  
of English

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Dean of the Graduate School

## CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER I: NATURE AND SYMBOLISM

CHAPTER II: NATURE AND MOOD

CONCLUSION

BIBLIOGRAPHY

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to show Tennyson's preoccupation with nature in his poetry, his use of her as a projector of moods and symbolism, the interrelation of landscape with depth of feeling and narrative or even simple picturesqueness. Widely celebrated as the supreme English poet and often called the Victorian Oracle,<sup>1</sup> Tennyson may well be considered the best exemplar of the nineteenth century. T. S. Eliot acclaimed his poetic greatness because of his "abundance, variety, and complete competence."<sup>2</sup> In addition to these positive attributes he displayed elements typical of the Victorian Age, dignity, seriousness, industrious application. More importantly, Tennyson was possessed of a real empathy with nature in the multiplicity of her vestments. She supported his moods, strengthened his designs, and provided harmonious backdrops for his lyrical or didactic purposes. In his alliance with her Tennyson employed the voice of nature poignantly, bleakly, beautifully, in portrayal as natural as his inspiration.

His most frequent symbols are "landscape, particularly when several levels sharply different can be seen . . .

---

<sup>1</sup>Martin S. Day, History of English Literature, 1837 to the Present (New York, 1964), p. 20.

<sup>2</sup>Elton Edward Smith, The Two Voices (Lincoln, Neb., 1964), p. 1.

rivers, usually with cataracts; stars . . . yellow colours and rose; cheerful bells; rust; songbirds; the restless sea and sterile rock,"<sup>3</sup> all used for their general impact, to reinforce or suggest a mood, to foretell a situation. The impact of stratified landscape, "from plain to cliff to sky,"<sup>4</sup> is apparent as Tennyson strives poetically to denote perfection in lofty Camelot, symbol of purity; misfortune and despair are the companions of twilight gloom, the misty sunset of an ebbing day. These, the gloom and nightfall, accentuate the tragic mood of Enoch Arden's homecoming and Mariana's grief for her faithless lover, as does the rugged landscape of Arthur's last journey over cliffs and crag to his death symbolize the downfall of the Round Table, in sharp contrast with his dream of the perfection of the island valley of Avilion "Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow."

That man and nature have such rapport is a fact more clearly understood by acquaintance with the background and environment of the poet, which will be dealt with here only insofar as it affected his poetic inspiration. The fourth son of the Reverend Dr. George Tennyson, reluctant

---

<sup>3</sup>Paul Franklin Baum, "Alfred Lord Tennyson" in The Victorian Poets, ed. Frederic E. Faverty (Cambridge, 1956), p. 125.

<sup>4</sup>Elizabeth Hillman Waterston, "Symbolism in Tennyson's Minor Poems," in John Killham's Critical Essays on the Poetry of Tennyson (London, 1966), p. 119.

rector, Alfred was born on August 6, 1809, at Somersby, in the delightful wolds of Lincolnshire. This, his first home, in its own natural setting of hollyhocks and lilies, of "twilight grots" and outstretched arms of the trees, the full foliage of the elms and sycamores, had a decisive influence on the boy who was to become the poet whose empathy with nature produced endless references in the poetry that would bring him eventually to the poet laureateship of England.<sup>5</sup>

With his brothers Charles and Frederick, Alfred went at an early age to a little village school in Holywell wood, beside the brook now made famous by Tennyson's poetic references. When the school was closed to avoid disturbing the wild life of the area, the boys went to study for the next five years at the Grammar School at Louth, where hating the school with boy-like vengeance, they nevertheless were educated.

Nature had a definite charm for Alfred in whom the spirit of the muse stirred early. Even when four or five years old, on stormy days he would extend his arms to the gale, chanting, "I hear a voice that's speaking to the wind."<sup>6</sup> And as a small boy he wrote blank verse lines praising flowers, which his younger brother Charles acknowl-

---

<sup>5</sup>Harold Nicolson, Tennyson, Aspects of His Life and Poetry (London, 1960), p. 39.

<sup>6</sup>Charles Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson (London, 1950), p. 25.

edged encouragingly with the praise, "You've done it."<sup>7</sup> Grandson Charles Tennyson quotes the young poet's boyish lines: "As the music of the moon/ Sleeps in the plain eggs of the nightingale . . ."<sup>8</sup> and Hallam Tennyson these early lines composed by his father: "When winds are east and violets blow,/ And slowly stalks the parson crow" and "The quick-wing'd gnat doth make a boat/ Of his old husk wherewith to float/ To a new life!"<sup>9</sup>

The children wandered about the countryside, following the "low-tinkled" brook, rambled along the river that shone through the "black-stemmed pines," listening to the "soughing reeds" in the fens.<sup>10</sup> Intensely aware of nature through environment and association, and steeped in poetry from a splendid home library, with an instinctive poetic inheritance from their father and the encouragement of their mother, all the boys wrote verses, Alfred his first "real" poems when he was eight.

Like his brothers, Alfred spent hours fishing in the brook, fencing with masks and foils on the rectory lawn, reading, composing and shouting poetry from opposite sides of the hedges, a favorite pastime with him and Charles. So

---

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Hallam Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson, A Memoir by His Son (London, 1897), vol. I, p. 95.

<sup>10</sup>Ruth Greiner Rausen, Poems of Alfred, Lord Tennyson (New York, 1964), Introd., p. vii.



it was that the environment of sombre remoteness and solitary nature in full communion profoundly impressed young Alfred's imagination, to the extent that he soon began to produce some astonishing poetry. Charles Tennyson tells us that his grandfather early thought of himself as an established poet, if one is to judge by an early manuscript written when he was about eleven years old and subsequently found in an unbound notebook of some sixty-three pages:

Vol. I - 1820 The Poetry of Tennyson  
 Vol. II - The Lyrical Poetry of Tennyson  
 Vol. III - The Prose Writings of Tennyson

Charles Tennyson re-emphasizes the influence of the Lincolnshire environment on Alfred's love of nature. He describes Somersby as

a tiny hamlet tucked remotely away in a corner of the Lincolnshire wolds . . . in a pleasant valley, down which flows the brook that formed the basis of so many of Alfred's similes and descriptions. The slopes of wold and valley are dotted with copses and noble trees. . . . Beyond this is the North Sea, peculiar for the long rise and fall of the tide over the flat sandy shore and fringed by a line of high sand dunes on which Alfred loved to wander, feeling as though he were "on the spine bone of the world. . . ."

In the middle of this rich and varied countryside lay the little white Rectory with its garden sloping down westwards to the meadow through which runs the brook.<sup>12</sup>

Nicolson, as well, describes the inspirational natural beau-

---

<sup>11</sup>P. 33.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., pp. 35-36.

ties of Somersby, with its gentler aspects of warmth, sweet smells, and colour, the songs of birds, the murmur of running water. But he contrasts these with the starkness of the ploughland on the hill, the twisted thorns, the trenches among the reeds and the rough storm trails on Warder Hill--all this beneath "the wide sweep of luminous sky; the low moon over the flats at harvest-time,"<sup>13</sup> accompanied by the constant, distant thunder of the sea. Those early years at Lincolnshire, with its "substantial rough-spun beauty" and its proximity to the sea never ceased to influence the poet whose nature remained in constant harmony with her who graduated the gentle murmur of the waters to the "cataract music of falling torrents."<sup>14</sup>

Summer holidays the Tennysons spent at the seaside cottage at Mablethorpe. There young Alfred's passion for the sea had full sway, particularly for the wild weather rampages of the North Sea--"The hollow ocean-ridges roaring into cataracts"--the sunsets splashing crimson over the flattened country, "The wide-winged sunset of the misty marsh."<sup>15</sup> His impression of the sea at Mablethorpe, "interminable waves rolling along interminable shores of sand,"<sup>16</sup> never left him. Through years of poetic productivity he continued to

---

<sup>13</sup>Nicolson, pp. 33-34.

<sup>14</sup>Hallam Tennyson, I, xii.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 197.

poetize the sea. This love was never more touchingly apparent than in one of his finest and final pieces, "Crossing the Bar," which terminates, at the poet's request, all editions of his poetry.

As a young man Tennyson continued to sing "of the brook flowing through his upland valley, of the ridg'd wolds that rose above his home, of the mountain glen and snowy summits of his early dreams."<sup>17</sup> With his brothers Charles and Frederick he published in 1827 a first volume of poetry, Poems by Two Brothers, containing mainly impressions of nature, many of the poems already suggestive of the lonely, sorrowful or questioning moods that were to haunt him through the years. Nature's presence was especially felt in "the more general themes such as flower-gardens, death, . . . and the Deity," these perennially characteristic of Alfred's verses.<sup>18</sup>

Outstanding in this first collection is the "Ode to Memory," attributed to Alfred, lines of fond recollections and reflections on the passing of time, and surely reminiscent of nature in the medley of desolation, peace, and natural beauty that was Lincolnshire. The effect of environment may be noted

as Tennyson recalls the realities most meaningful to him, scenes that recur significantly

---

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. xii.

<sup>18</sup>Nicolson, p. 52.

throughout his poems, "high, bushless fields, a sandy ridge, a cottage overlooking a marsh, a garden with dark alleys opening on plots of roses, lily, and lavender.<sup>19</sup>

That external nature provided inspiration and impressions stored to meet emotions eventually portrayed in poetry is further substantiated by Jerome Hamilton Buckley, who declares that nature in the early Somersby pieces is

already an atmosphere rather than a tangible entity: the moon haunts a Tennysonian landscape, "The screaming waste of desolate heath," the pastures are still and plangent, "soft as dewy sleep"; the woods are charged with indeterminate life, the "counterchang'd embroidery of light and darkness"; and the sea itself, all mutability and all permanence, is the sum of private impressions.<sup>20</sup>

Leaving Somersby in 1828 to enter Trinity College, Cambridge, Tennyson met Arthur Hallam, the more-than-dear friend for whom he held a profound affection, and whose premature death was to have a dominant effect on Tennyson's life and poetry, the driving force in fact behind the creation of his master-work, In Memoriam.

The incipient poet received formal recognition when, in 1829, he won the Chancellor's Medal for the poem "Timbuctoo." The following year, with the admiration and support of the Cambridge group and especially Hallam, he published

---

<sup>19</sup>Waterston, loc. cit., p. 114.

<sup>20</sup>Jerome Hamilton Buckley, Tennyson, The Growth of a Poet (Cambridge, Mass., 1961), p. 14.

his first independent volume, Poems Chiefly Lyrical, more outstanding for promise than performance, apprentice-work to his developing career. Leaving Cambridge in 1831 without a degree, the young romantic lyricist assumed increasingly the role of moralist, respectable, conforming, yet possessed of a deep strain of "violence, flashes of bitter realism, and even irreverent humor."<sup>21</sup>

In the summer of 1830 he journeyed with Hallam through France to the Spanish frontier to volunteer with the insurgents. Returning with no experience of warfare, he received nevertheless impressions of the Pyrenean landscape which were later woven into "Oenone" and other poems. Subsequent travels to Switzerland ("The Princess"), Italy ("The Daisy"), Norway, Portugal, Germany, and throughout his beloved England left indelible recollections of nature and landscape that became a positive part of his poetry.<sup>22</sup>

In 1837 Tennyson sorrowfully moved his family from the rectory to High Beech, Epping Forest. His distress for the old associations as well as the new impressions is recorded in In Memoriam, the earliest verses of which were jotted down in 1833, with subsequent verses as time and mood progressed. Time and zest and energy gradually revi-

---

<sup>21</sup>Day, p. 21.

<sup>22</sup>Samuel C. Chew, ed., Tennyson, Representative Poems (New York, 1941), p. xv.

talized the poet's creativity. In 1842 a new and revised edition of Poems appeared. One of the finest publications of the nineteenth century,<sup>23</sup> it revealed mature artistry and an expansive range of interests and sympathies, from the "Morte D'Arthur" to the English Idyls--"Dora," "The Gardner's Daughter," "Audley Court"--and the more substantial "Locksley Hall," all of them containing lovely passages "which illustrate Tennyson's kinship with the English school of landscape painters."<sup>24</sup>

A massive productivity of poetry was to follow, articulate in nature's multiple facets. The especially keen, natural sensitivity with which the poet was endowed led to "a long series of triumphs--laureateship, peerage, Farringford, Aldworth, Westminster Abbey."<sup>25</sup>

The year 1850 was particularly significant and happy for Tennyson. Marked by the publication of In Memoriam, it is also notable for his marriage to Emily Sellwood, to whom he had been intermittently betrothed for years, and for his appointment, succeeding William Wordsworth, as Poet Laureate of England. Farringford on the Isle of Wight, with its new vistas and echoes, he purchased shortly thereafter, his home for most of each year. An ivy-covered country house, picturesquely set between

---

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. xvii.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>F. L. Lucas, Tennyson (London, 1966), p. 5.

grassy lawns and a thick grove, it afforded glimpses of meadow and sea and the dark blue horizon of the Chanel through the elm-tree bower. Hallam Tennyson describes his father's pleasure on frequent walks at Farringford when he would climb the steep chalk cliff, his characteristic observation so keen that not a flower on the downs or a strange bird escaped his notice, and the geology of the coast, terrestrial and submarine, was familiar to him.<sup>26</sup> An active man, he enjoyed physical work on the estate, cutting new glades in the copses, building the summerhouse, going to sea with the fishermen to whom he recited his verses. He delighted in word sketches of flowers, the roses and honeysuckle, just as he had, years before, made poetic the herbaceous garden of the rectory.

Nor did the natural environment of Farringford go unacknowledged poetically by the lyricist whose awareness prodded him to produce "faithful, stimulating pictures of English country scents and sounds and habits."<sup>27</sup> It was the Isle of Wight that inspired these random verse memoranda in Tennyson's notebook: "As those that lie on happy shores and see/ Thro' the near blossom slip the distant sail" and "Before the leaf,/ When all the trees stand in a mist of green."<sup>28</sup> Inspirational for Maud were "The dry-

---

<sup>26</sup>I, 419-20.

<sup>27</sup>Nicolson, p. 280.

<sup>28</sup>Hallam Tennyson, I, 466.

tongued laurel," shining glossily in the sun, the lawn cedar that "sighed for Lebanon" and "the liquid azure bloom of a crescent sea."<sup>29</sup> His feeling for nature at Farringford was poetized in "The Holy Grail" in 1868. Tennyson's beloved Emily writes in her journal of April of that year, "a great deal of smoke in the yew-trees this year. One day there was such a cloud that it seemed to be a fire in the shrubbery."<sup>30</sup> It was then that the poet wrote the speech of Ambrosius, the lines about this "smoke" of "the pollen of the yew blown and scattered by the wind: 'O brother, I have seen this yew-tree smoke,/ Spring after spring for half a hundred years.'"<sup>31</sup>

Tennyson never forsook Farringford, but in 1869 acquired an alternate home, the gracious estate of Aldworth with its great expanse of landscape, where he continued to enjoy country life in the genteel sense. This second home, below drifting clouds and above the blue expanse of waters, was as well chosen as the first. Highly situated, it afforded the poet a broad view of English lands as it basked in summer beauty, bounded only by "the inviolate sea."<sup>32</sup> These lines addressed to Sir Edward Hamley after a visit to Aldworth Tennyson wrote as a pro-

---

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 420.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., II, 53.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 297.



logue to "The Charge of the Heavy Brigade." His son Hallam says that they are accurately descriptive of the autumnal view from that residence.

Our birches yellowing, and from each  
The light leaf falling fast,  
While squirrels from our fiery beech  
Were bearing off the mast,  
You came, and look'd and loved the view,  
Long known and loved by me,  
Green Sussex fading into blue  
With one gray glimpse of sea.<sup>33</sup>

Described by a shepherd on the Tennyson farm as "a wonderful man for Nature and life,"<sup>34</sup> the aging Laureate wrote in 1889, partly for his grandson Lionel, the lullaby in "Romney's Remorse":

Father and mother will watch you grow,  
And gather the roses wherever they blow,  
And find the white heather wherever you go,  
My sweet.<sup>35</sup>

The poet might well declare, "I do but sing because I must/ And pipe but as the linnets sing,"<sup>36</sup> but deeply rooted was his early impression of the poet's function of message, gathered perhaps from his association with Arthur Hallam and the Apostles years before. His message, however, was rarely unenhanced by nature and landscape, from the rectory garden to the "soft steaming monochrome of the Isle of Wight," to the trim complacency of

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 297.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 325.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., I, 371.

<sup>36</sup>Nicolson, p. 274.

Surrey.<sup>37</sup>

In 1884, aged but no less productive, the Poet Laureate accepted from Queen Victoria the honor of the peerage as Baron Tennyson of Aldworth and Farringford. He continued to write with zest and vigor in this last period of his creativity.

On October 4, 1892, Tennyson lay comatose and dying. Still lucid at intervals, he spoke faintly of a journey back to Farringford; "he asked for his Shakespeare; he made them pull up the blinds--'I want the blinds up. I want to see the sky and the light!'"<sup>38</sup>

When the end came two nights later, Hallam Tennyson says that "the full moon flooded the room and the great landscape outside . . . we felt thankful for the love and utter peace of it all, and his own lines of comfort from In Memoriam were strongly borne in upon us."<sup>39</sup> Beloved nature, in the solemn stillness of the moon-lit night, did indeed accompany her old friend as he "crossed the bar."

---

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 280.

<sup>38</sup>Nicolson, p. 207.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 200.

CHAPTER I  
NATURE AND SYMBOLISM

"If anybody ever had and consciously cultivated a movie-camera eye, it was Tennyson."<sup>1</sup> Of exquisite skill in observing and expressing external nature situations, he used nature in her multiple facets, from that of surface-smooth picturesqueness to a more complex vehicle by which to display symbolism, often integrated with mood. The fact that Tennyson remained a nature poet through his long range of poetry "led Arthur Hallam to define him in 1831 by the then technical term 'picturesque!'"<sup>2</sup> Francis Palgrave, another close friend of the poet, in 1897 published Land-  
scape in Poetry from Homer to Tennyson, in which, aware of the latter's partnership with nature, he "makes plain the kind of traditional perspective in which Tennyson set his craftsman's interest in the problem of landscape."<sup>3</sup> Landscape offered a broad course for one so inclined to its association, and Tennyson used it with the master touch of accuracy of observation and description complemented by symbolic interpretative application. His was the instinct to represent faithfully all natural objects, simple or

---

<sup>1</sup>H. M. McLuhan, "Tennyson and Picturesque Poetry," in Killham, p. 83.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 72.

extraordinary, and to weave trusted nature into a meaningful fabric of ideas and imagery in his poetry.

Hallam Tennyson observes that his father always lived in the presence<sup>1</sup> of nature and, concerning that special love, quotes this passage from William Gladstone:

'Nowhere could we more opportunely than at this point call attention to Mr. Tennyson's extraordinary felicity and force in the use of metaphor and simile.

This gift appears to have grown with his years, alike in abundance, truth and grace. As the showers descend from heaven to return to it in vapour, so Mr. Tennyson's loving observation of Nature and his Muse seem to have had a compact of reciprocity well kept on both sides. . . . Sometimes applying the metaphors of Art to Nature, he more frequently draws the materials of his analogies from her unexhausted book, and however often he may call for some new and beautiful vehicle of illustration, she seems never to withhold an answer.'<sup>4</sup>

In a footnote to the above passage Hallam records also Benjamin Jowett's avowal that "'Tennyson may be said to have always lived in the presence of Nature.'"

Tennyson's own declaration of his real compact with nature is clearly stated in "The Palace of Art" (first published in 1832; practically rewritten and published again in the 1842 edition). In addition to the poet's acknowledgement of his alliance with nature, the poem shows mature artistry on the part of Tennyson, espe-

---

<sup>4</sup>II, 133-34.

cially in the use of landscapes employed in a sort of "tapestry technique . . . baroque and complex in its symbolism."<sup>5</sup>

Ornate descriptions, nature related all, of the allegorical palace of the soul symbolize the "shifting moods of the self-pleasuring soul,"<sup>6</sup> which, loving beauty and the triumph of intellectual supremacy, loses sight of its relationship with God and man.<sup>7</sup> "The many-chambered life of the imagination, furnished with all the treasures of natural beauty,"<sup>8</sup> the palace is a perfect square, built high on a lofty crag, sublimely adorned by pure beauty mid "landscapes dramatically lit or serene as a canvas by Constable."<sup>9</sup> It would seem an omission to this study not to quote these stanzas from the poem, Tennyson's admission of his deliberate use of nature for mood symbolism, the allegorical soul and its shifting emotions.

Full of great rooms and small the palace  
stood,  
All various, each a perfect whole  
From living Nature, fit for every mood  
And change of my still soul.

---

<sup>5</sup>Waterston, loc. cit., p. 121.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Hallam Tennyson, I, 193.

<sup>8</sup>E. D. H. Johnson, The Alien Vision of Victorian Poetry (Hernden, Conn., 1963), p. 11.

<sup>9</sup>Buckley, p. 52

For some were hung with arras green and  
 blue,  
 Showing a gaudy summer-morn,  
 Where with puff'd cheek the belted hunter  
 blew  
 His wreathed bugle-horn.

One seem'd all dark and red - a tract of  
 sand,  
 And someone pacing there alone,  
 Who paced for ever in a glimmering land,  
 Lit with a low large moon.

One show'd an iron coast and angry waves,  
 You seem'd to hear them climb and  
 fall  
 And roar rock-thwarted under bellowing  
 caves,  
 Beneath the windy wall.

And one, a full-fed river winding slow  
 By herds upon an endless plain,  
 The ragged rims of thunder brooding low,  
 With shadow-streaks of rain.

And one, the reapers at their sultry toil,  
 In front they bound the sheaves. Behind  
 Were realms of upland, prodigal in oil,  
 And hoary to the wind.

And one, a foreground black with stones  
 and slags,  
 Beyond, a line of heights, and higher  
 All barr'd with long white cloud the scorn-  
 ful crags,  
 And highest, snow and fire.

And one, an English home--gray twilight  
 pour'd  
 On dewy pastures, dewy trees,  
 Softer than sleep--all things in order  
 stored,  
 A haunt of ancient Peace.

Not these alone, but every landscape fair  
As fit for every mood of mind,  
 Or gay, or grave, or sweet, or stern, was  
 there

Not less than truth design'd.<sup>10</sup>

Waterston notes the disillusioned soul, pleasure-sated and saddened finally, confronted with "dark corners," "uncertain shapes," and "white-eyed phantasms," the recognition of change apparent in a shift of scenic imagery.<sup>11</sup> The mood of struggle and misery, conflicting emotions of fear and defiance, symbolize the peril of "excessive concentration on the love of beauty and pride of intellect"<sup>12</sup> so obvious in the earlier more joyous description. Tennyson now likens the lost and lonely soul, its hedonistic adventures abandoned, to

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

Perhaps the sand-locked pool (or soul) may hear as well the roar of barren rocks, or the "wild beasts of uncontrolled passion"<sup>13</sup> in a dramatization of the loneliness of the sensitive soul and the unhappy impact of self-indulgent passion."<sup>14</sup> Beauty alone cannot satisfy the longings of a human soul absorbed in sinful selfishness.

---

<sup>10</sup> Alfred Tennyson, "The Palace of Art," from The Poems of Tennyson, Cambridge Edition of the Poets, ed. W. J. Rolfe (Boston, 1898), p. 43. All quotations from Tennyson's poetry in this paper are from this edition.

<sup>11</sup>Loc. cit., p. 121.

<sup>12</sup>Charles Tennyson, p. 194.

<sup>13</sup>Waterston, loc. cit., p. 122.

<sup>14</sup>Buckley, p. 53.

McLuhan calls "The Palace of Art" a "gallery of pictures, a creation of worlds discovered by painters."<sup>15</sup> "Framed for the ear in a style of gold," it is, indeed, an allegory of pictures garbed as well in nature.

The poems "Oenone," "The Palace of Art," and "The Lotus-Eaters" (1833-42) emphasize the power of sensuous beauty over the heart, while showing at the same time an interesting range of scenic symbolism.<sup>16</sup> "Oenone," one of the most deftly woven of Tennyson's early poems is an experiment in classical legend pertaining to the mythological "Idalian Aphrodite."<sup>17</sup> The scene is laid in Asia Minor, but the landscape actually pictured is that of the Pyrenees, through which Tennyson and Arthur Hallam had travelled in the summer of 1830. Hallam Tennyson tells us that from that time forward "the lonely Pyrenean peaks, the mountains with 'their streaks of virgin snow,' like the Maladetta, mountain 'lawns and meadowledges midway down,' and the 'long brook falling thro' the clov'n ravine,' were a continual source of inspiration."<sup>18</sup> Part of the poem was written in the Valley of Caunteretz (to which Tennyson returned thirty-one years later and wrote the poignant "In

---

<sup>15</sup>McLuhan, p. 82.

<sup>16</sup>Waterston, loc. cit., p. 121.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>I, 55.



the Valley of Caunteretz") where he found much of the scenic beauty exactly transcribed that adorns the poem. Relying probably on James Beattie's "The Judgment of Paris" (1765), Tennyson treats the lament of Oenone, forsaken by Paris, with a profusion of natural imagery, as in the "Marianas," more impressive than human emotion. Oenone's sorrow has been called "only a painted grief upon a painted mountain."<sup>19</sup> The radiance of the landscape so characteristic of Tennyson's early style is especially effective in the opening lines:

There lies a vale in Ida, lovelier  
 Than all the valleys of Ionian hills,  
 The swimming vapour slopes athwart the glen,  
 Puts forth an arm, and creeps from pine to pine,  
 And loiters, slowly drawn. On either hand  
 The lawns and meadow-ledges midway down  
 Hang rich in flowers, and far below them roars  
 The long brook falling thro' the clov'n ravine  
 In cataract after cataract to the sea.

There is agonizing contrast between this, "the early misty beauty in the Vale of Ida (the soul) before Aphrodite's triumph, and the final stripped and barren landscape, night without mist,"<sup>20</sup> as Oenone, tormented and abandoned, walks "the cold and starless road of death." Her purpose of revenge against "the cold crown'd snake" that is Paris relates her to the larger tragedy, the burning of Troy, as "A fire dances before her," and "by night and day,/ All earth and

---

<sup>19</sup>George O. Marshall, Jr., A Tennyson Handbook (New York, 1963), p. 64.

<sup>20</sup>Waterston, loc. cit., p. 121.

air seem only burning fire."

Helen, marking "the victory of beauty for beauty's sake,"<sup>21</sup> is the immediate cause of Oenone's rejection by "evil-hearted Paris," who "Leading a jet-black goat," potential symbol of evil perhaps, came up the reedy Simois. Buckley declares that it is Helen who "leads the train of fateful ladies in 'A Dream of Fair Women,' each the symbol of 'Beauty and anguish walking hand in hand/ The downward slope of death.'"<sup>22</sup>

Also a member of the "sensuous soul" group, "The Lotus-Eaters" echoes "the longing of an imaginative spirit to retire from the conflicts of life,"<sup>23</sup> symbolizing dramatically "in both theme and imagery the seduction of the sensuous art, the temptation to escape from reason and responsibility."<sup>24</sup>

The expression of Tennyson's own inclination toward tranquillity and lassitude, his "desire for dreamful ease,"<sup>25</sup> is manifested in poetic description of "languid land in amber light, where the yellow lotus dust blows beneath three silent pinnacles--changeless land, contrasted

---

<sup>21</sup>Buckley, p. 54.

<sup>22</sup>p. 54.

<sup>23</sup>Charles Tennyson, p. 133.

<sup>24</sup>Buckley, p. 38.

<sup>25</sup>Marshall, p. 71.

with the warring, confused, time-filled, dark blue ocean."<sup>26</sup> The scenery in the introductory stanzas is partly that of the Cirque de Gavarnie in the familiar Pyrenees, a supremely artistic landscape where "like a downward smoke, the slender stream/ Along the cliff to fall and pause did seem." In such an environment the poet sets the seeking mood in the hypnotic attitude of nature mid "cool mosses, creeping ivies, weeping flowers, and sleepy poppies,"<sup>27</sup> the sensuous intoxication and aesthetic experience that await "the mild-eyed melancholy Lotus-Eaters." These, life's fugitives, taste the flower and fruit from enchanted branches while they seek languorously in the land of perpetual sunset--"The charmed sunset linger'd low adown/ In the red West"--to submerge themselves in the illusion of quiet nature where "the folded leaf is wood from the bud." Yet they are unable to attain the carefreedom that they seek because of the memory of old responsibilities. Buckley declares:

Thus, though they hymn the enchanted landscape with the richest assonance, they remain, in spite of themselves, too desperately eager for the beautiful illusion to achieve its calm. By indirection the argument itself suggests that an easeful escape from life into an inhuman passivity, an amoral art for art's sake, is neither possible nor humanly desirable.<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup>Waterston, loc. cit., p. 122.

<sup>27</sup>Rausen, p. xi.

<sup>28</sup>Buckley, pp. 48-49.

Like "The Palace of Art," "The Lotus-Eaters" is concerned with a forbidden evasion of reality. The mariners who choose the island-narcotic, symbol of escapism, commit the same sin, in essence, as the self-isolating soul in the palace. The error of the Lotus-Eaters results as well from the desire for freedom from the responsibilities of life,<sup>29</sup> the wish for excessive beauty symbolized in nature.

It is interesting to note that, while here the West is representative of "a place of twilight, of rest, or warmth and secrecy . . . the home of 'all good things,'"<sup>30</sup> Tennyson customarily

connects the West with images of the sea, of growth, and paradoxically, of death. The antithesis of this condition he conceived as the land of dawn, bold and strong, full of activity and strife . . . .

This West, for example, is essentially the land of "The Lotus-Eaters" and of "The Sea Fairies"; it has affinities with the submarine world of "The Merman" and "The Mermaid." The feelings that are associated with it are evoked whenever Tennyson expressed his enduring temptation to relinquish the struggle of life--as he did in "The Two Voices" and In Memoriam. Wherever it is used, Tennyson's development of this image-complex is based on a light-dark, evening-morning contrast, and incorporates the notion of a retreat to

---

<sup>29</sup>Smith, p. 31.

<sup>30</sup>G. Robert Stange, "Tennyson's Garden of Art," in Killham, p. 104.

the past and an envisioning of the  
lost paradise.<sup>31</sup>

Concerning this same aspect of Tennyson's use of imagery, Buckley notes that in "The Hesperides" the East represents the "common day of human action"; the West symbolizes the evening of half-light, of mystery and restful contemplation and "hoarded wisdom."<sup>32</sup> In "Youth," written in 1833 and never published, Stange tells us that the West serves as a symbol of the sheltering past, as does the East the rigorous, uncertain future. Under the stress of indecision, the poet faces the choice between past and future:

Confused and ceasing from my quest,  
I loiter'd in the middle way,  
So pausing 'twixt the East and West,  
I found the Present where I stay.<sup>33</sup>

Maintaining his reliance on the ways of nature, Tennyson, always "a hearer of voices,"<sup>34</sup> was never unaware of the lure of the sea. His love for her did not go uncompensated; she gave him ungrudgingly of her beauty, majesty, vigour, her spirit, infinity. An outstanding poem relating to the sea, "The Kraken," a short, yet intensely emotional piece of only fifteen lines, takes the reader "Below the thunders of the upper deep/ Far, far beneath in the abysmal

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>Buckley, p. 47.

<sup>33</sup>Stange, loc. cit., p. 105.

<sup>34</sup>Smith, p. 18.

sea . . ." to a formidable atmosphere of strange grotesqueness in nature, of darkness and shadowy forms. There sleeps the Kraken, fabulous sea monster of Norway, who will not awaken "Until the latter fire shall heat the deep." This allusion to fire Houghton and Stange tell us is to that fire in which the world will finally be consumed.<sup>35</sup> Waterston suggests that the kraken symbolizes death as a sea monster.<sup>36</sup> It appears probable to this writer that by the monster the poet darkly represents sin, nature the poetic implement to demonstrate the evil that lives in mankind. Sin cannot exist in God's light; hence its survival in the sea-worm-infested depths of darkness. On the Judgment day, when sin (the kraken) rises from the depths of the subconscious, represented here by the sea bottom, the monster will die. Many of man's sins, we may infer, like the kraken, are hidden in the abysmal depths of man's subconscious mind, to be forced finally into the light of awareness, thus to be terminated. "The Kraken," with its sombre, natural imagery is one of Tennyson's most forceful poems.

In "Break, Break, Break" (1842) the poet's personal gloom because of Arthur Hallam's death is exquisitely evi-

---

<sup>35</sup>Walter Houghton and G. Robert Stange, Victorian Poetry and Poetics (Boston, 1959), p. 5.

<sup>36</sup>Loc. cit., p. 117.

dent from the opening lines, his anguished cry, "Break, break, break,/ On thy cold gray stones, O Sea!" As the poem progresses, one sees the height of symbolic use of landscape, "in perfect balance the 'subject' of death and the 'other reality' of temporal stones and eternal sea."<sup>37</sup> Regret for the past is intensified by contrast "between the sea (whose individual waves breaking on the shore lose their own identity, but whose infinite nature is unchangeable) and the tender grace of unreturning time."<sup>38</sup> Reminiscent of Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach," the sea is used as a device to set the mood of the poem and to show, in symbolism, the real indifference of nature.

Tennyson said that he wrote "Break, Break, Break" "in a Lincolnshire lane at five o'clock in the morning between blossoming hedges,"<sup>39</sup> but the proximity of his home at Somersby to the North Sea, where he was accustomed to take long walks along the coast, made it less than difficult for memory to evoke a realistic portrayal of the sea, certainly more meaningful than mere scene painting. His poetic use of her was naturally suggestive of strong personal feelings.

These very personal feelings, intermittent inspi-

---

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 123.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Hallam Tennyson, I, 190.

ration, and desultory composition over a period of seventeen years resulted in what many readers consider Tennyson's most impressive lyrics, In Memoriam. Its disparate parts joined together at last, the poem was published in 1850 under the title "Fragments of an Elegy." Commemorating the immortality of human love, itself the expression of the distress and doubt and faith that were an integral part of Tennyson after Hallam's death, the spiritual experience of the poem modulates into a hymn of faith in which Hallam is himself the symbol of life.<sup>40</sup> Tennyson's descriptive range is the whole "poignant landscape of his loss."<sup>41</sup>

Chew calls the poem a meditative record not only of fresh grief but of a long series of changing moods and fluctuating thoughts. The poem's high argument, that "'Many waters cannot quench love,' not even the waters of death,"<sup>42</sup> demonstrates anew the poet's life-long rapport with the sea.

Water, for Tennyson the "perpetual and ambiguous symbol of changeless change," the sea, the ocean, river, brook, snow or rain, "Lethean springs," "spires of ice,"

---

<sup>40</sup>Buckley, p. 110.

<sup>41</sup>Hugh I'Anson Fausset, Tennyson, A Modern Portrait (New York, 1923), p. 143.

<sup>42</sup>P. xxx.



symbolizes the mutability of man and the infinite oneness of nature. As the water of life brings spiritual regeneration, so does it also hold the terror of death and destruction and a "vast and wandering grave."<sup>43</sup> Hence the poet's fear early in the poem that the ship bearing Hallam's body home may be lost where

the roaring wells  
Should gulf him fathom-deep in brine  
And hands so often clasp'd in mine,  
Should toss with tangle and with shell.

The exquisite series of lyrics, "swallow-flights of song that dip/ Their wings in tears and skim away," immortalizes in In Memoriam the unique friendship of Hallam and Tennyson, made more meaningful by the poet's "habitual definition of a moment of awareness in terms of objective landscape."<sup>44</sup> In the short poems composing the sections of his masterwork, Tennyson sought and found especial strength in nature. In his essay, "In Memoriam," T. S. Eliot says that "here the poet finds full expression."<sup>45</sup> In the opinion of Arthur J. Carr, Tennyson makes of "life and nature . . . a continuum extending uninterruptedly towards a spiritual climax,"<sup>46</sup> while Fausset declares that the poem, inspiration of "a poet who observed and recorded nature as through the

---

<sup>43</sup>Buckley, p. 113.

<sup>44</sup>McLuhan, p. 82.

<sup>45</sup>In Killham, p. 211.

<sup>46</sup>"Tennyson as a Modern Poet," in Killham, p. 57.

microscope of his senses" is nowhere marred by the luxuriant description prevalent in the earlier poems.<sup>47</sup>

In this "Way of the Soul,"<sup>48</sup> one sees the progress of emotion from the poet's mood of bitter grief and doubt, the whole world darkened, to more calm despair, and, finally, acceptance and certainty of love in God and nature. Hallam Tennyson tells us that his father saw the greatness and the glory in all the universe, and he was particularly endeared to the science of nature. He weighed carefully every new fact within range.

As he exulted in the wilder aspects of Nature and revelled in the thunderstorm, so he felt a joy in her orderliness; he felt a rest in her steadfast, patient progress and hopefulness; the same seasons ever returned; the same stars wheeled in their courses; the flowers and trees blossomed and the birds sang yearly in their appointed months; and he had a triumphant appreciation of her ever-new revelations of beauty.<sup>49</sup>

In the series of poems that composes In Memoriam each one expresses a nuance in Tennyson's changing grief. The accumulated work marks by three Christmas seasons the stages in the gradual rise of spirit of the poet, although interspersed throughout by visible torments of heart, despair, regret, uncertainties interpreted largely through nature. Healing does not come quickly, but thoughtfully,

---

<sup>47</sup>P. 159.

<sup>48</sup>Day, p. 24.

<sup>49</sup>I, 312-13.

searchingly, in "the concentrated diary of a man confessing himself . . . a message of hope and reassurance."<sup>50</sup>

"The anguish of wounded love passes into the triumph of love over sorrow, time and death."<sup>51</sup>

In the early stanzas of In Memoriam Tennyson is himself too much obsessed by grief to use poetry as anything but "a means of release."<sup>52</sup> Reflecting his mood in nature, he early laments the indifference of her who brings the seasons, perennially, relentlessly; he envies the "stubborn hardihood" of "the sullen tree," while he, like nature now, stands "A hollow form with empty hands," symbol of his own inadequacy without Hallam, expressed in these lines:

I sometimes hold it half a sin  
To put in words the grief I feel:  
For words, like Nature, half reveal  
And half conceal the Soul within.

The well-meaning condolences of his friends he describes as "vacant chaff well meant for grain"; life without his friend is "ghastly thro' the drizzling rain," "a blank day"; his own poetic effort is "this poor flower of poesy." Inner peace is a mere seedling as one sees the beginning of resignation and a calmer grief:

---

<sup>50</sup>Eliot, loc. cit., p. 212.

<sup>51</sup>A. C. Bradley, A Commentary on Tennyson's In Memoriam (London, 1907), p. 27.

<sup>52</sup>Johnson, p. 18.

O, to us,  
 The fools of habit, sweeter seems  
 To rest beneath the clover sod,  
 That takes the sunshine and the rains. . .

The poet in his incipient mood of acceptance and acquiescence to nature's ways symbolizes in her this new state of approaching peace.

Calm is the morn without a sound,  
 Calm as to suit a calmer grief,  
 And only thro' the faded leaf  
 The chestnut pattering to the ground:

Calm and deep peace on this high wold  
 And on these dews that drench the furze,  
 And all the silvery gossamers  
 That twinkle into green and gold.

Likening himself to a "dove when up she springs," Tennyson emphasizes in the natural imagery of height and the turbulence of autumnal storm his slowly changing mood as

Tonight the winds begin to rise  
 And roar from yonder dropping day;  
 The last red leaf is whirl'd away,  
 The rocks are blown about the skies.

Grief and uncertain peace mingle with fragile hope as "The sunbeam strikes along the world" and "yonder cloud . . . rises upward always higher."

Token of Hallam's life, the symbolic hope of re-birth is perhaps indicated by the lines, "And from his ashes may be made/ The violet of his native land." The earth is indeed English earth, and the violet will bloom

in English springtime.<sup>53</sup> With the developing poem, the conventions of the artificial pastoral fuse more and more with the elements of a real pastoral--"The meadows breathing of the past/ And woodlands holy to the dead"--pictures, word-music all, the products of a keen observation of nature.<sup>54</sup>

As the poem continues, so does Tennyson's objectivity, and he seems to enter a phase when his personal suffering is gently abated and he finds some measure of solace. The section just preceding the approach of the first Christmas season describes his rising spirits. One can feel with him the improving mood, the Christmas promise as "The time draws near the birth of Christ." The darkness of despair turns to the vague hopefulness of symbolic "mist" as once again they "weave the holly round the Christmas hearth."

The time draws near the birth of Christ:  
The moon is hid; the night is still;  
The Christmas bells from hill to hill  
Answer each other in the mist.

Tennyson's mood is always happiest when memory prompts him to poetize scenery and incidents shared with Hallam. Sorrow sheds an inward radiance over scenes and seasons delicately drawn. Lyrical verses such as "When on my bed the moonlight falls," or "Now fades the last long

---

<sup>53</sup>Buckley, p. 116.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

streak of snow" approach perfection.<sup>55</sup> Pleasing recollections include verses completely Tennysonian in natural description:

In walking as of old we walk'd  
Beside the river's wooded reach,  
The fortress, and the mountain ridge,  
The cataract flashing from the bridge  
The breaker breaking on the beach.

As in earlier poems, so does the evening still suggest a feeling of sadness. Of vacillating mood, the poet's doubts increase "when sundown skirts the moor," bringing with it "inner trouble" and "spectral doubt," memories of "The eternal landscape of the past." He recalls fondly the years at Somersby, presenting in sensuous detail the witch-elms that checkered the lawn in concrete patterns of light and shade; the cool air of "the ambrosial dark" with the distant "landscape winking through the heat";<sup>56</sup> the breadth and height of tall sycamores. Morning brings the sound of the scythe against damp grasses, and at twilight

brushing ankle-deep in flowers  
We heard behind the woodbine veil  
The milk that bubbled in the pail,  
And buzzings of the honeyed hours.

Again, in moods of despondency, he makes use of the customary light and dark contrast in nostalgic recollections often of life associated with natural settings, "when my

---

<sup>55</sup>Fausset, p. 161.

<sup>56</sup>Buckley, p. 117.

light is low," and "on the low dark verge of life/ The twilight of eternal day"; he compares himself to "An infant crying in the night;/ An infant crying for the light." Throughout the elegy darkness is the most frequent image of the four basics:<sup>57</sup> darkness (or night), connoting separation, doubt or death, "the darkened earth" without Hallam, "the doubtful dusk" of uncertainty; day, or light; rain, or water; the hand. Few lines are more exquisitely symbolic of Tennyson's acceptance of Hallam's life-in-death than these:

But there is more than I can see,  
 And what I see I leave unsaid,  
 Nor speak it, knowing Death has made  
 His darkness beautiful with thee.

T. S. Eliot says that "That strange abstraction, 'Nature,' becomes a real god . . . perhaps more real at moments to Tennyson than God."<sup>58</sup> Despairingly the poet queries:

Are God and Nature then at strife,  
 That Nature lends such evil dreams?  
 So careless of the type she seems,  
 So careless of the single life.

Still vacillating, he rails against "Nature, red in tooth and claw," that has allowed this discord to come about, that Hallam's life, "Thy leaf hath perish'd in the green," "an appropriate analogue in nature for untimely death."<sup>59</sup> In

---

<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

<sup>58</sup>Loc. cit., p. 213.

<sup>59</sup>Buckley, p. 116.

this dark hour nature's message is a terrible one as she shrieks against his creed, "that the world is a process of ceaseless change in which individual existences arise to pass without return, that its forces show no evidence that they value life more than death."<sup>60</sup> Nature, indifferent to types, "From scarp'd cliff and quarried stone," regarded by herself, would not convince him of the immortality or God since "I found Him not in world or sun/ Or eagle's wing or insect's eye."

Certainly, nature that seemed to Tennyson to die with Hallam, must suffer decay with the coming of autumn. Though an impersonal force and uncompromising in her attitude toward man, the poet imagines nevertheless her sympathetic decline on that death-distressful day:<sup>61</sup>

Day, when my crown'd estate begun  
 To pine in that reverse of doom  
 Which sickened every living bloom,  
 And blurr'd the splendour of the sun.

Who usherest in the dolorous hour  
 With thy quick tears that make the rose  
 Pull sideways, and the daisy close  
 Her crimson fringes to the shower.

As wan, as chill, as wild as now;  
 Day, mark'd as with some hideous crime,  
 When the dark hand struck down thru time  
 And cancell'd nature's best.

Comes a second Christmas, and by that time a still

---

<sup>60</sup>Bradley, p. 56.

<sup>61</sup>Buckley, pp. 116-17.



calmer grief as "silent snow possessed the earth." Tenny-  
continues to sing of his friend:

But thou and I are one in kind,  
As moulded like in Nature's mint;  
And hill and wood and field did print  
The same sweet forms in either mind.

For us the same cold streamlet curl'd  
Thro' all his eddying coves, the same  
All winds that roam the twilight came  
In whispers of the beauteous world.

With Tennyson's exoneration of Death, "Nor blame  
I Death . . ./ I know transplanted human worth/ Will bloom  
to profit elsewhere," the really forward movement is in-  
tensified in lyrics to spring, picturesque and symbolic  
of rebirth. To the poet's cry, "O sweet new-year delaying  
long;/ Thou doest expectant nature wrong . . ." are added  
these verses pregnant with the desire to live and rejoice:

What stays thee from the clouded noons,  
Thy sweetness from its proper place,  
Can trouble live with April days,  
Or sadness in the summer moons,

Bring orchis, bring the foxglove spire,  
The little speedwell's darling blue,  
Deep tulips dash'd with fiery dew,  
Laburnums, dropping-wells of fire.

O thou, new-year, delaying long,  
Delayest the sorrow in my blood,  
That longs to burst a frozen bud  
And flood a fresher throat with song.

The refreshing calm of "Sweet after showers, ambro-  
sial air" that dispel the "gloom of evening," his great sor-  
row for his friend, symbolize preeminently Tennyson's rising  
spirits, his sense of joyous peace in nature, and his inten-

tions of going back into the world, although his fidelity of love for Arthur Hallam does not lessen. Nor does memory fade as he sings:

I climb the hill: from end to end  
Of all the landscape underneath,  
I find no place that does not breathe  
Some gracious memory of my friend.

It is a natural consequence, therefore, that In Memoriam contains an abundance of nature-based poetry, life-long scenic recollections of the sea, his travels, landscapes that could be related to the mood or symbolism of a poem. There is a season, a weather, a rising mist, the light-dark contrast already discussed, some type of natural imagery appropriate to his mood. Nearing the end of the poem, the revival of his spirit, restored by faith and hope, is dreamfully expressed in nature, ". . . then flew in a dove/ And brought a summons from the sea . . . ," the sea of Tennyson's most beloved natural imagery.

With the coming of the third Christmas--"The time draws near the birth of Christ;/ The moon is hid, the night is still"--church bells are pealing in the mist that rises over a quiet scene of awakening joys in the birth of Christ. The poet greets the new year with lines now grown familiar, welcoming not only the new year, but his new acceptance of life.

Ring out, wild bells, to the wild sky,  
The flying cloud, the frosty night:  
The year is dying in the night;  
Ring out, wild bells, and let him die.

Ring out the old, ring in the new,  
 Ring, happy bells, across the snow,  
 The year is going, let him go;  
 Ring out the false, ring in the true.

There are six more stanzas in this section, but the last two lines summarize the new hope now growing in the poet's mood, "Ring out the darkness of the land,/ Ring in the Christ that is to be."

It is interesting to note the stages of changing emotions indicated by a shift of adverbs at each Christmas season: the first, "And sadly fell our Christmas-eve . . ."; the second, "And calmly fell our Christmas-eve . . ."; and finally, "And strangely fell our Christmas-eve . . ." <sup>62</sup> As in the ensuing Idylls of the King, the progress of the poem has been on a seasonal plan built around three Christmastides, two anniversaries of Hallam's death, and three recurring springs. <sup>63</sup> Fading grief merges finally into abiding love and faith. This fluctuating mood, so frequently equated to a phase of nature, are set in nature, backdrop, symbol, imagery. As the work nears its final stanzas, these verses are of the most meaningful, suggestive of the new day that is dawning:

Now fades the last long streak of snow,  
 Now burgeons every maze of quick  
 About the flowering squares, and thick  
 By ashen roots the violets blow.

---

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 119.

<sup>63</sup>Chew, p. 305.

Now rings the woodland loud and long,  
 The distance takes a lovelier hue,  
 And down'd in yonder living blue  
 The lark becomes a sightless song.

It cannot be said that In Memoriam is a "vertebrate structure." Its totality depends, "like that of the sea's gelatinous beauties,"<sup>64</sup> upon a fluid medium, the floating mist of grief and hope and faith which enveloped the poet's life for many years and which, in the elegy, crystallizes into genuine emotions, ideas and reflections.<sup>65</sup> The unique beauty of this his masterwork discovers Tennyson's essential lyrical inspiration and establishes his enduring poetic greatness.<sup>66</sup> The poet did not cry in vain, "O leave not thou thy son forlorn;/ Teach me, great Nature, make me live."<sup>67</sup>

One of the first fruits of Farringford, Maud, "A 'Drama of the Soul' set in landscape glorified by love,"<sup>68</sup> appeared in Maud and Other Poems in 1855, five years after the publication of In Memoriam, its inspiration essentially the same as that of the elegy. The lines,

O that 'twere possible  
 After grief and pain  
 To find the arms of my true love  
 Round me once again!

These, the grain round which Maud was constructed, may be

---

<sup>64</sup>C. H. O. Scaife, The Poetry of Alfred Tennyson (London, 1930), p. 59.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid.

<sup>66</sup>Nicolson, p. 230.

<sup>67</sup>Fausset, p. 77.

<sup>68</sup>Hallam Tennyson, I, 393.

taken equally as the text of both poems.<sup>69</sup> A combination of Tennyson's inclination toward poetry of action, already evident in "The Princess" (1847), the lyrical eloquence of his earlier poetry and the neurotic distress of many of the best stanzas of In Memoriam, in Maud are found all his finest poetic qualities, including a number of exquisite songs.<sup>70</sup>

Certain reviewers of the time were less charitably inclined, however, describing the moody melodrama as an 'unreal allegory of the Russian war,' " 'a spasm,' " 'a political fever,' " and " 'the dead level of prose run mad.' "<sup>71</sup> Although the poet uses the poem as a vehicle for his own opinions on the Crimean War and the social evils of England, he nevertheless relates nature to reality and to his purposes. Hallam Tennyson quotes from his father's Journal his reflections on the battle of the Alma:

Looking from the Beacon and seeing the white cliffs and the clear sea, their violet gray shading seemed to us tender and sad; perhaps the landscape seemed so sad because of the sorrowful news of the death-roll in the Crimea . . .<sup>72</sup>

The poetic monodrama treats of the problems, love and derangement of an emotionally unstable young man, the

---

<sup>69</sup>Scaife, p. 21.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid.

<sup>71</sup>Fausset, p. 188.

<sup>72</sup>I, 380.

speaker in the "succession of semi-lyrical episodes in which the varying moods and situations are suggested rather than analyzed."<sup>73</sup>

The morbid hero progresses through lyric poetry rich in imagery in nature, this imagery as important as the theme. John Killham in his essay "Tennyson's Maud, The Function of the Imagery," emphasizes the beauty and accuracy of description of the landscape, scene of the action, and the careful integration of the seasons of the year with the hero's moods. Despite careful allusion to English landscape and climate, the brilliance of the lyric effects rests primarily upon the imagery, in this case, often artificial. Tennyson is often considered limited in range since he draws so much from external nature, and here he employs the hero's keen sensitivity to nature in order to convey a unique imaginative experience. By unusual atmospheric tints--"a bed of daffodil sky," "a dull red ball," "yellow vapours"--the poet suggests the narrator's obsessive state of mind. The opening lines of the poem are set in landscape that conveys an atmosphere of ruin and the agitation of the hero, his melancholy and depression. "And out he walk'd when the wind like a broken wordling wail'd,/ And the flying gold of the ruin'd

---

<sup>73</sup>Chew, p. xxxiv.

woodlands drove thro' the air."<sup>74</sup> Concerning these verses Hallam Tennyson also notes: "My father pointed out that even Nature at first presented herself to the man in sad visions,"<sup>75</sup> "moonless nights," "a wintry wind," "the shining daffodil dead."

While Tennyson's use of the natural "scents, sounds and colours,"<sup>76</sup> of a normal English environment is a tribute to his virtuosity, his use of such imagery in his poetry emphasizes both mood and dramatic situation, enriching the lyrics and becoming in Maud "the natural means of thought expression by the hero."<sup>77</sup> Here the young man dramatizes his disillusionment through natural elements, as in the scenic imagery of these opening lines: "I hate the dreadful hollow behind the little wood,/ Its lips in the field above are dabbled with blood-red heath." The heather is not blood-red, actually, yet the hero in his imagination, intensified by graphic mental images of violence and death, visualizes the vivid and "frightening circumstances of his father's death in the 'dreadful hollow behind the little wood.'"<sup>78</sup> From this initial traumatic reference to suspicious, bitter fancies, the poet reveals the painful associa-

---

<sup>74</sup>In Killham, p. 226.

<sup>75</sup>I, 396.

<sup>76</sup>Killham, loc. cit., p. 220.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., p. 231.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., p. 220.

tion of red as "The red-ribb'd ledges drip with a silent horror of blood." He later indulges his senses with red imagery in "The blood-red blossom of war with a heart of fire." Obviously Tennyson's descriptive imagery is not limited to the beautiful.

The dreamy young recluse, depressed and brooding, recalls the horror of that "shuddering night" as he endures sleepless sorrow in "the hush of the moonless nights." He dreams of Maud, once his childhood playmate, now lost to him through antagonisms and cynicism. Rankling memories torment him as he learns of her return to the village, yet he does not fear involvement since "there is fatter game on the moor" than he. His inner turbulence, however, in night visions shows itself in tempestuous nature:

in my own dark garden ground,  
Listening now to the tide in its broad-flung  
ship-wrecking roar,  
Now to the scream of a madden'd beach  
~~dragg'd down by the wave.~~

Here again Hallam Tennyson notes the accuracy of his father's observation of natural phenomena employed in his poetry, that the "broad-flung ship-wrecking roar" actually can be heard at Farringford on the Isle of Wight, nine miles away from the beach.<sup>79</sup> While the localities in Maud are all imaginary, "invented landscape,"<sup>80</sup> the poet's son declares that much of the natural description is accurately from Farringford.

---

<sup>79</sup>I, 402.

<sup>80</sup>Stopford A. Brooke, Tennyson, His Art and Relation to Modern Life (London, 1894), p. 256.



The confused young man's catastrophic world becomes, in his half-madness, "a world of plunder and prey," like "the untamed world of nature where 'The Mayfly is torn by the swallow, the sparrow spear'd by the shrike.'"<sup>81</sup> He lives alone, a degraded puppet of nature,<sup>82</sup> "half-hid in the gleaming wood"; he hears "the shrieking rush of the wainscot mouse," and feels "the shower of dancing leaves" as he relates his heart metaphorically to stone.

Maud, called by Steane "the antiphonal voice of In Memoriam . . . a nineteenth century grotesque, a vivid, often beautiful freak,"<sup>83</sup> ranges in mood from despair to ecstasy. The hero employs interesting animal imagery as he describes Maud's proper suitor as one whose "rabbit mouth is ever agape" and later as a hovering "bird of prey" and a hopeful "titmouse." The English he represents as "long-neck'd geese" and rats. Others despicable to him are the lean and hungry wolf, the drone, "the whole weak race of venomous worms," while he sees himself "a wounded thing with a rancorous cry." As his bitter, self-pitying mood slowly changes, so does the natural symbolism. Maud, fresh like the morning, becomes "a milk-white fawn" who has "but fed on the roses and lain in the lilies of life." John Killham says that the picture of the milk-white fawn, aside from

---

<sup>81</sup>J. B. Steane, Tennyson (New York, 1969), p. 101.

<sup>82</sup>Brooke, p. 244.

<sup>83</sup>p. 88.

the beauty of the imagery, carries in it "the power of softening the concept of 'nature red in tooth and claw' that until now has obsessed the hero's mind."<sup>84</sup> As his feeling for her ripens into love, he envisions her as a bird with a shining head that sings alone "In the happy morning of life and of May," her grace as "bright and light as the crest of a peacock." She becomes to him a jewel, even her feet "like sunny gems on an English green."

In the spontaneity of natural association even the birds celebrate Maud's presence as their songs ring through the woods and meadows rosy with daisies, "Maud is here, here, here/ In among the lilies." More worldly "Birds in the high Hall-garden" carol factiously for the cause of the more acceptable suitor, "this fool lord," favored by Maud's arrogant brother. The latter, as hard as flint, the former is visualized as a predatory bird.<sup>85</sup>

As the hero's increasingly hopeful meanderings take him to Maud's rose garden, he thinks of her hand on the gate, "hand as white as ocean-foam in the moon." The quietude is broken only by the sound of the rivulet running down to his dark wood or the swelling wave of the sea in the gray dawn. In the "stormy gulf" of his life he has "found a pearl,/ "The countercharm of space and hollow sky," his own "Bright

---

<sup>84</sup>Killham, loc. cit., p. 233.

<sup>85</sup>Hallam Tennyson, I, 380.

English lily" because of whom "A livelier emerald twinkles in the grass,/ A purer sapphire melts into the sea."

Hallam Tennyson notes his father's delineation of the hero's moods, first bitter and yearning for "a philosopher's life in the quiet woodland ways, "later awakened and refreshed by the clarion call of "A voice by the cedar tree."<sup>86</sup> As the incidents of the plot are overshadowed by the emotions of the hero, "loneliness, desolate longing and imagined happiness transmit Tennyson's skill with words into a unique verbal felicity."<sup>87</sup> Now the hero prays, "O let the solid ground/ Not fail beneath my feet . . ./ Let the sweet heavens endure,/ Not close and darken above me" before love's culmination, knowing, finally, that Maud reciprocates his love. He exults in exhilarating, nature-related lyrics: "Go not happy day,/ From the shining fields." There is culminating joy in the invitational poem:

Come into the garden, Maud,  
For the black bat, night, has flown,  
Come into the garden, Maud,  
I am here at the gate alone.  
And the woodbine spices are wafted abroad,  
And the musk of the rose is blown.

From the natural, flowing beauty of these lines Lucas infers that "Tennyson breathed most happily out of doors."<sup>88</sup>

---

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., pp. 396-97.

<sup>87</sup>Scaife, p. 72.

<sup>88</sup>Lucas, p. 26.

A kindred spirit, the young lover is tranquilized by the fading light of Venus "On a bed of daffodil sky," the sweet stirring of the jessamine and the slowly setting moon. His communion with the flowers continues the romantic reverie:

The slender acacia would not shake  
 One long milk-bloom on the tree;  
 The white lake-blossom fell into the lake  
 As the pimpernel dozed on the lea;  
 But the rose was awake all night for your sake  
 Knowing your promise to me;  
 The lilies and roses were all awake,  
 They sigh'd for the dawn and thee.

"The red-ribb'd hollow behind the wood" once again becomes the image of spiritual storm as the hero, having killed his sweetheart's mocking brother, has to withstand emotions, "the shock of cataract seas." In his shocked condition he comes significantly upon a "lovely shell,/  
 Small and pure as a pearl," like him "a piece of detritus washed up on the Breton shore . . . like it, too, he has developed a hard shell which protects his intensely vulnerable inner life."<sup>89</sup> While Tennyson employs "theatricality with a heightening but not a distortion of nature,"<sup>90</sup> the young man finds himself enriched by a new strength comparable to that of the beautiful shell and enters the world of human experience. Hallam Tennyson suggests that the shell, undestroyed by stormy seas, may symbolize the hero's

---

<sup>89</sup>Waterston, loc. cit., p. 115.

<sup>90</sup>Fausset, p. 193.

"first and highest nature preserved amid the storms of passion."<sup>91</sup> He dreams of Maud, his own "dove with the tender eye," as he sings his gratitude in autumn for the change that has been wrought in his life.

My mood is changed, for it fell at a time of year  
 When the face of night is fair on the dewy downs,  
 When the shining daffodil dies, and the Charioteer  
 And starry Gemini hang like glorious crowns  
 Over Orion's grave low down in the west.

Although he has "crept so long on a broken wing," the hero is raised to sanity by love, despite the physical loss of Maud. With his change of mood come spiritual strength and rapport with his fellow man.

Nature in the guise of symbolism integrated with mood is a dominant force in Tennyson's poems pertaining to Arthur, an accumulated work which appeared in instalments after Maud and became, eventually, the Idylls of the King, considered by Tennyson and others of his age the "repository of his highest teaching."<sup>92</sup> Accounts of the mythical king, the fantastic scenery of Lyonesse, the sacred mount of Camelot, had strong appeal for the young poet who delighted in

a drifting world of dreams, in landscape delicate and unreal as floating tapestry, in the fine affectations of chivalry, and in a character which could be interpreted by a not too literal fidelity to legend, as a model of single-minded virtue and valiant purity.<sup>93</sup>

---

<sup>91</sup>I, 404.

<sup>92</sup>Scaife, p. 21.

<sup>93</sup>Fausset, p. 202.

The attractiveness of the theme enhanced by visits to Cornwall and Wales, the poet's senses and emotions knew the satisfaction of an exact and minute observation of nature, and he became primarily "a painter in words of landscape and romantic incident,"<sup>94</sup> the theme infused into a measure of "ethical symbolism."<sup>95</sup>

Spanning a period of fifty-six years, from "The Lady of Shalott" (1833) to "Merlin and the Gleam" (1889), Tennyson's interest in the Arthurian legend was first formalized in three Arthurian poems, "Morte d'Arthur," "Sir Launcelot," and "Queen Guinevere" (1833 volume), although his first uncompleted series of Idylls did not appear until 1859. A one-volume edition was published in 1889 which contained the twelve Idylls of the King in what has remained the established order: "Dedication" (to the memory of the Prince Consort), "The Coming of Arthur," "Gareth and Lynette," "The Marriage of Geraint," "Geraint and Enid," "Balin and Balan," "Merlin and Vivien," "Lancelot and Elaine," "The Holy Grail," "Pelleas and Ettarre," "The Last Tournament," "Guinevere," "The Passing of Arthur," and the Epilogue "To the Queen."<sup>96</sup>

When Tennyson turned in 1856 to his earlier love and

---

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., p. 203.

<sup>95</sup>Chew, p. xxxv.

<sup>96</sup>Marshall, p. 137.

"Merlin and Vivien," the first poem to take its place in the chain of episodes described above, one cannot feel certain that he cherished any conscious moral purpose. Upon the completion of the series, however, he could say: "The general drift of the Idylls is clear enough. The whole is the drama of man coming into practical life and ruined by one sin." Simultaneously, he affirmed: "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."<sup>97</sup> Hence the symbolism in the poems may be variously interpreted.

Primarily allegorical, the Idylls are a resplendent tapestry "suffused with the Tennysonian glamour of golden mist,"<sup>98</sup> a blend of morality and poetic art. Nature oriented passages abound, some picturesquely beautiful, many peculiarly significant to the mood and symbolism of the developing theme, ornate imagery and atmosphere that unify the "chivalric tableaux."<sup>99</sup> Lucas describes the over-all natural glow of the scene painting in the poems as

often consummate . . . as when Bleys and Merlin snatch the infant Arthur from the great phosphorescent wave upon Tintagel shore; or Gareth comes amid the myriad pine-tops, on that lonely mere glaring in the sunset, "round as the red eye of an Eagle-owl"; or in the ruined castle of Enid's girlhood the knotted

---

<sup>97</sup>Fausset, p. 205.

<sup>98</sup>Nicolson, p. 237.

<sup>99</sup>Buckley, p. 171.

snakes of ivy climb sucking the mortal from its shattered towers; or Merlin dimly sees his doom like the white wavecrest mirrored in the glassy sand beneath it as it breaks; or in the misty moonlight of a glen in Lyonesse the King treads from its skeleton a skull with jewelled crown; or Lancelot drifts across the moonlit surf to the lion-haunted tower of Carbonet.<sup>100</sup>

That Tennyson remained closely affected by natural environment is further affirmed by Palgrave after a visit to the Laureate at Farringford in 1867. They had been walking to the undercliff, "a noble natural terrace, edging the sea and tossed into endless small mounds and valleys,"<sup>101</sup> when Tennyson said, "This exactly represents some of the romantic landscape before my mind's eye in the 'Idylls': little winding glades, closed all round with grassy mounds and wild shrubs, where one might fancy the sudden appearance of a knight riding or a spell-bound damsel."<sup>102</sup> This same type of natural association he once pointed out in one of his own fields beyond the summerhouse at Freshwater. Similarly, a visit by the poet to Middleham Castle during a tour of Derbyshire and Yorkshire resulted in these particularly picturesque lines from "Geraint and Enid," quoted by Hallam Tennyson as he elaborates on his father's persistent observation of nature:

And here had fall'n a great part of a tower

---

<sup>100</sup>Lucas, p. 28.

<sup>101</sup>Hallam Tennyson, II, 47.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid.



Whole like a crag that tumbles from the cliff  
And like a crag was gay with wilding flowers.<sup>103</sup>

Reiterating the poet's love for the North Sea and the thunderous roar of the breakers on the Lincolnshire shore, Hallam affirms the natural accuracy of these verses from "The Last Tournament":

As the crest of some slow-arching wave,  
Heard in dead night along that table-shore  
Drops flat, and after the great waters break  
Whitening for half a league, and thin themselves,  
Far over sands marbled with moon and cloud  
From less and less to nothing.<sup>104</sup>

"The Coming of Arthur," introductory idyll of the series, composes, with "The Passing of Arthur," a frame for the remaining Idylls of the King, these two defining the beginning and the end of Arthurian society, each poem a stage in its growth or decline. Each idyll has an appropriate seasonal background, its colors accenting "the prevailing temper of the protagonists in the foreground" as they "symbolize the moral conditions of the realm,"<sup>105</sup> the conflict between flesh and spirit.

Notable for the significance of nature and landscape, "The Coming of Arthur" appeared in 1870 in The Holy Grail and Other Poems. To the "great tracts of wilderness, / Wherein the beast was ever more and more," the waste lands

---

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., I, 487.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>105</sup>Buckley, p. 173.

of Cameliard, overrun by wild animals and human hordes--the wilderness and waste lands symbolic of moral degradation--comes Arthur, himself the symbol of "Ideal manhood in real man."<sup>106</sup> His efforts to lighten "this dark land" from oppression and immorality are sustained by an atmosphere of optimism in natural height and early day as the forest lets in the sun and Camelot, "symbolic of the gradual growth of human beliefs and institutions, and of the spiritual development of man,"<sup>107</sup> stands a radiant "protest against the bestial wasteland."<sup>108</sup>

Far off they saw the silver-misty morn  
 Rolling her smoke about the Royal mount,  
 That rose between the forest and the field.  
 At times the summits of the high city flash'd;  
 At times the spires and turrets half-way down  
 Prick'd thro' the mist, at times the great gate shown  
 Only, that open'd on the field below:  
 Anon, the whole fair city disappear'd.

Arthur, going forth to battle, sees "even in high day the morning star," token of promise, while the freshness and vitality that infuse the liberated lands of Leodogran and the love of Arthur for Guinevere are fused in springtime imagery.<sup>109</sup>

Then Arthur charged his warrior whom he loved  
 And honor'd 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 return'd  
 Among the flowers, in May, with Guinevere.

---

<sup>106</sup>Ibid., p. 175.

<sup>107</sup>Hallam Tennyson, II, 127.

<sup>108</sup>Fausset, p. 264.

<sup>109</sup>Steane, p. 117.

Nature remains the symbol of happiness and fulfillment as Arthur weds Guinevere in an environment of natural awakening and beauty while his knights sing joyfully, "Blow trumpet, for the world is white with May!" Few lines designed in nature can suggest more optimism than these:

Far shone the fields of May thro' open door,  
 The sacred altar blossom'd white with May,  
 The sun of May descended on their King,  
 They gazed on all earth's beauty in their Queen.

The "summer-wan" atmosphere of Arthur's court is still untainted in "Gareth and Lynette." Young Gareth's sorrowing queen-mother knows nature's sympathy to her lonely mood when she is "Waken'd by the wind which with full voice/  
 Swept bellowing thro' the darkness on to dawn." Of entirely different mood is the valiant prince who sees only promise in the "silver-misty morn" of "starry-white" Camelot, home of courageous knights whose honor shines "like the dewy star/  
 Of dawn." Still symbolic of the triumph of "rational purpose over the wilderness of desire," the lofty city remains incomparable with its "shining towers" and sun-etched "shadowy palaces."<sup>110</sup> Gareth hears only the melody of the birds, on branch and in mid-air; he sees the damp hill-slopes "quicken'd into green/ And the live green kindled into flowers," his enthusiasm undaunted by the challenging seneschal, a man blustering in typical Tennysonian simile "like a sudden wind among dead leaves," or the scornful Lynette of the

---

<sup>110</sup>Buckley, p. 186.

"May-blossom brow" and "apple blossom cheek." Even nature, not always beneficent, poses obstacles when

to the shore of one of those long loops  
 Wherethro' the serpent river coil'd they came.  
 Rough-thicketed were the banks and steep;  
 Full, narrow.

Buckley notes the symbolism of the colors white and red as Gareth departs through "the weird white gate" to meet his adversaries, the brothers of Death: Morning Star, with his crimson banner; Noonday Sun, astride a "huge red horse"; and Evening Star, suffused "all in rose-red from the west." White purity is triumphant as red Death's hatred for Arthur yields, defeated.<sup>lll</sup>

"The Marriage of Geraint" first suggests an illicit love affair between the Queen and Lancelot, "Tho' yet there lived no proof, nor yet was heard/ The world's loud whisper breaking into storm," as Tennyson metaphorically relates the impending disaster of Arthur's Round Table to rampaging nature. The incipient thread of destruction by sensual love weaves increasingly throughout the poems. The opening line of "Merlin and Vivien" alludes to approaching storm, while Mark knowingly declares, "Here are snakes within the grass," and Vivien notes the Queen and Lancelot's intrigue with the cynical lines, "Ah little rat that borest in the dyke/ Thy hole by night . . ." In this particular idyll Fausset ob-

---

<sup>lll</sup>Ibid., p. 178.

serves that the seduction theme, the corruption of the sage by one of "Satan's shepherdesses," yields to descriptive imagery taken from Tennyson's Cornish notebook:

So dark a forethought roll'd about his brain  
As on a dull day in an Ocean cave  
The blind wave feeling round his long sea-hall  
In silence . . .

or from his New Forest notebook, for the scenery of "the wild woods of Broceliande,"<sup>112</sup> where Merlin yields to passion as "a fierce, expressionistic storm rages over 'the ravaged woodland.'"<sup>113</sup>

Word-pictures of the wild, highly decorative Welsh landscape, Tennyson's environment during the writing of "Geraint and Enid," embellish, surpass even, the unoriginal story of Geraint, the knightly-boor husband, and Enid, the beaten-dog-wife who loves her master more.<sup>114</sup> Jealous and confused, he forces Enid to desert the court with him and seek "Gray swamps and pools, waste places of the hern,/ And wilderness, perilous paths," symbols of frustration.<sup>115</sup>

Elaine, "The Lily Maid of Astolat," of "Lancelot and Elaine," may be called the poet's most exquisite female fantasy,

a little, helpless, innocent bird  
That has but one plain passage of few notes,

---

<sup>112</sup>Fausset, pp. 206-07.

<sup>113</sup>Buckley, p. 187.

<sup>114</sup>Fausset, p. 208.

<sup>115</sup>Buckley, p. 187.

Will sing the simple passage o'er and o'er  
For all an April morning.

Fausset declares that in this idyll the poet satisfies all his desire to show how undisciplined passion can corrupt love. The rose harbouring the unseen worm symbolizes the faithless Queen, while Elaine, the stainless lily, is "the essence of pure art and April innocence."<sup>116</sup>

While it has been said that in "Guinevere," Tennyson was lost to thought in the 'delicious dales' . . . of his versification,<sup>117</sup> nature's gifts are hardly less lavishly celebrated in "Balin and Balan," where early in the poem the brothers are returned in favor to Arthur's Court "With joy that blazed itself in woodland wealth/ Of leaf and gayest garlandage of flowers," and the nightingale sings "full-toned in middle May." Joy is subsequently sullied by murder in the dark woods, and Balin's envious admiration of Lancelot causes him to sigh

as a boy lame-born beneath a height,  
That glooms his valley, sighs to see the peak  
Sun-flushed, or touch at night the northern star.

The intrigue of Guinevere and Lancelot is nourished in scenic delight, in landscape where "A walk of roses ran from door to door;/ A walk of lilies crost it to the bower." Lancelot asserts his will to chastity through the lily, sym-

<sup>116</sup>Fausset, p. 210.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid., p. 121.

bol of purity, yet yields to Guinevere's will to sensuality in the "garden rose/ Deep-hued and many folded." The landscape contrasts sharply when angry Balin, apprised of the Queen's disloyalty to her lord, returns to the state of bestial nature and throws the royal crown "Among the forest weeds." His passion now is emphasized by long glades, a cavern-chasm darkness, as "The whole day died, but dying, gleam'd on rocks/ Roof pendent sharp." Even King Pellam's castle is shrouded woefully, "lichen-bearded, grayly draped/ With streaming grass," its battlements "overtopt with ivy-tods," house bats and owls, portending a darkness as ominous as Pellam's own decadent asceticism. The image of decay, the castle shares a kinship with Yniol's manor in the land of the Sparrow-hawk, "all overgrown with fern and 'monstrous ivy-stems' like coiled snakes" and the hall of Doorm, uncouth and barren as the waste earldom.<sup>118</sup> Camelot itself is deteriorating in direct proportion to the immorality of its citizenry.

Like the dreary environment of Lancelot's defeat in "The Last Tournament" and the dark nature that was companion to Pelleas in his disillusion, the dim, white day of Balin's frenzy is made more awesome by the sound of grating sprays and whining boughs, melancholy portents of tragedy. Vivien, who has reduced Balin to madness, watches him assault Balan

---

<sup>118</sup>Buckley, p. 186.

and dismisses the dying brothers as two "brainless bulls,/ Dead for one heifer." Habitually employing animal imagery, she describes her squire as a "living dog," preferable to a "dead lion," and the knights of Arthur's Court as swine, rats whose burrowings must be "ferreted out"; her snake-like self she names the "gilded summer fly/ Caught in a great old tyrant spider's web,"<sup>119</sup> while to Merlin she appears the "wave about to break upon me/ And sweep me from my hold upon the world."

With "The Holy Grail," Tennyson, continuing to work in symbolic mood, unrestrainedly adapts his materials to his own sharp, coherent "vision of the Arthurian world." The grail quest actually proves no sacred mission except to dedicated Galahad, but an "unholy mistake, the symptom and the contributing cause of a social decadence" in Arthur's realm,<sup>120</sup> now become the "scandalous hive of wild bees." There is hope in the quest, nevertheless, and nature sets an expectant note for the knights' departure "when the sun broke next from under ground." Sir Percivall recounts anticipatively that "never yet/ Had heaven appear'd so blue, nor earth so green." Moments of discouragement find him at opposite extremes in nature, faltering from "a sense of deep un-

---

<sup>119</sup>Ibid., p. 185.

<sup>120</sup>Ibid., p. 171.



worthiness,"<sup>121</sup> "thirsting in a land of sand and thorns" or "A bedmate of the snail and eft and burdock," or "lost in the quagmire" of Arthur's prediction.

Fausset, like Buckley, considers the quest symbolic of "the fever of a decadent society already sapped by sin and not the culmination of a noble life."<sup>122</sup> The wilderness--wasteland--is most effective imagery as it connotes in "The Holy Grail" the searing emptiness of selfish desire vanquished only by Sir Galahad, the most humble knight of all,<sup>123</sup> who finds himself at last accompanied by the vision of the Holy Grail. In an attitude of solemnity in stark landscape the Holy Thing moved with him,

Fainter by day, but always in the night  
 Blood-red, and sliding down the blacken'd marsh  
 Blood-red, and on the naked mountain top  
 Blood-red, and in the sleeping mere below  
 Blood-red.

So does nature reinforce the mood, from the bright sunshine of hope, through the thorny land of discouragement and "sundry perils," to the solemnity of bleak landscape in final attainment of the sacred goal for Galahad. Not so for mighty Lancelot in whom one sin poisoned the "wholesome flower" of his character till he was driven "into waste fields" of failure and discouragement, "to the naked

---

<sup>121</sup>Ibid., p. 188.

<sup>122</sup>Fausset, p. 263.

<sup>123</sup>Buckley, p. 187.

shore,/ Wide flats where nothing but coarse grasses grew," and the "blackening sea," like a cataract of foam and motion could not wash away his sin. Galahad of the pure heart gains the vision of the Holy Grail "Clothed in white samite or a luminous cloud" yet "Redder than any rose." A glimpse, "All pall'd in crimson" is troubled Lancelot's only reward.<sup>124</sup>

Tennyson introduces an optimistic mood in youth, promising and zealous, in "Pelleas and Ettarre," an atmosphere of sunshine and sweet-smelling fields. Pelleas, who subsequently finds his lady in the "green glooming twilight" likens her to "A rosy dawn kindled in stainless heavens" while she, in turn, compares him to "a dog before his master's door!/ Kick'd he returns . . ." reminiscent of the patient Enid. In the developing narrative turned bitterly ironic, the poet emphasizes in hot, silent night the doubt and uncertainty of the young knight, in contrast now with the earlier mood of hope and love. Shaken by hearing again the significant words of a song he had once heard sung to the Queen, "A worm within the rose," he paces quietly, almost knowingly, through Ettarre's garden "Of roses white and red, and brambles mixt," suggestive of his own confused emotions, until he discovers Gawain's treachery.<sup>125</sup> His reaction is

---

<sup>124</sup>Ibid., p. 182.

<sup>125</sup>Ibid.

one of recoil in natural symbolism--"Back as a hand that pushes thro' the leaf/ To find a nest and feels a snake, he drew."

Not only is the personal tragedy of Pelleas emphasized by natural similes, but also the sense of foreboding of Lancelot and Guinevere when

The Queen  
 Look'd 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.

These same birds of prey Tennyson likens in "The Last Tournament" to Arthur's words which "flying shriek'd" around the head of guilty Lancelot. Twilight is fast enshrouding Arthur's reign in terminal night.

Tennyson resorts again to pessimistic nature in the autumnal scene of "The Last Tournament" when Dagonet, fool, mock-knight of the Round Table, dances "like a wither'd leaf" at lofty Camelot, "high above the yellowing woods," while nature sickens with man's iniquities. Unlike the sunny tournament morning that "blushed and brake" for Pelleas, day breaks now "with a wet wind blowing," and the jousts begin in the dismal setting of thunder and wind and "yellowing leaf/ And gloom and gleam, and shower." The attitude is one of general gloom caused by Lancelot's defeat by Tristram, who receives the ruby carcanet in avaricious red hands and dreams of the white-handed wife he has abandoned. The lost glory

of Arthur's Court and the all-pervading irony are felt in sorrowing nature as "the wan day," besieged by heavy rain, "Went glooming down in wet and weariness." Dagonet, the "wither'd leaf," now "Quiet as any water-sodden log," dances no more, while victorious Tristram sings praises to the sensuality of earthly loves, relating the status of love to nature:

Free love--free field--we love but while we may;  
The woods are hush'd, their music is no more;  
The leaf is dead, the yearning past away:  
New leaf, new life--the days of frost are o'er.

His ride westward takes him "thro' slowly mellowing avenues" of drifting autumn leaves, "Mid-forest, and the wind among the boughs," natural portents all of the autumn of his own life, approaching death, Mark's vengeance.

Sorrow and tragedy are further heightened by darkness as morality in the kingdom continues to yield to sensuality and disillusion; the disintegration of Arthur's reign is more and more apparent. "The Last Tournament," begun as "one white day of Innocence, . . . ends with white banners besmirched and watching ladies eager to shed 'the simple white that they may glow in kindlier colors.'"<sup>126</sup> Arthur returns to the dark bower of his faithless queen "All in a death-dumb autumn-dripping gloom." The bleak winter of Arthur's reign is rapidly approaching.

---

<sup>126</sup>F. E. L. Priestly, "Tennyson's Idylls," in Killham, pp. 241-42.

The tragic collapse of Arthur's moral aims throughout the Idylls, equating allegorically the degeneration of nation, society, and individuals, is the aftermath of the rejection of spiritual values.<sup>127</sup> Final collapse is symbolized in the terminal idyll, "The Passing of Arthur," in dark, wintry December, "in the dead world's winter." In Arthur's final battle "On the waste sand by the waste sea," landscape represents once again the end brought about by accumulated passions, frustrations, selfishness, in the rapidly dying year. Here Tennyson again relates the west to the eventide of life. Accompanied by Sir Bedivere "in the white winter of his age," King Arthur, on their march westward, laments the obscurity of God's ways and mankind's imperfections, still relating God and nature:

I found Him in the shining of the stars,  
I mark'd Him in the flowering of His fields,  
But in His ways with men I find Him not.

The atmosphere of the night "ere that last weird battle in the west," "the deathwhite mist . . . over sand and sea," the suggestion of an "isle of rest" for Arthur, "the moonlight haze among the hills"--all this sets forth the premonition of death, even as Arthur pushes Sir Modred's army "Back to the sunset bound of Lyonesse." After the dreadful battle, nature remains the poet's faithful ally as

---

<sup>127</sup>Buckley, p. 187.

"the dolorous day/ Grew drearier toward twilight falling"  
 and only "the whisper of the seething seas" broke the  
 "dead hush." The mist shrouds him from all earthly things  
 as the arm, "clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,"  
 receives Excalibur. Sir Bedivere bears Arthur

through icy caves  
 And barren chasms, and all to left and right  
 The bare black cliff clang'd round him, as he based  
 His feet on juts of slippery crag that rang  
 Sharp-smitten with the din of armed hells--  
 And on a sudden, lo, the level lake,  
 And the long glories of the winter moon!

On the funeral barge three queens await Arthur,  
 their cries of lamentation "like a wind that shrills/ All  
 night in a wasteland." Tennyson's description of the stark  
 landscape differs sharply from the King's conception of his  
 sweet destination:

the island-valley of Avilion;  
 Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,  
 Nor ever wind blows loudly; but it lies  
 Deep-meadow'd, happy, fair with orchard lawns  
 And bowery hollows crown'd with summer sea.

That congruity exists between action and scene is evident  
 in the description of the bare, bleak land of Cornwall and  
 the island valley of Avilion. The sun rises, and with it  
 comes the new year full of promise.

Although the Idylls are individually beautiful,  
 there is in the entire work impressive evidence of a decay-  
 ing society apparent in each poem. The gradual loss of  
 innocence and virtue culminates in "Death, a satisfying

complement to discipline."<sup>128</sup> In the poetry the change is rendered uniquely in nature by Tennyson's careful handling of the cycle of the seasons, the hope of regeneration in the fresh springtime of Arthur's coming, the fulfilment of his May-time wedding, the arrival of Gareth at Camelot still uncorrupted "past the time of Easter-day," through a lingering summer of "intense idealisms and hot destructive passions."<sup>129</sup> The impending tragedies of foreboding autumn with her yellowing, withering woods are culminated in "The Last Tournament" in October, while Guinevere repents in chill November. Finally, the dark night of bleak winter "the wasteland of Arthur's defeat,"<sup>130</sup> symbolizes the eventual triumph of moral confusion of that last "dim, weird battle" in December.

Concerning the poet's acknowledgement of the association of plot and seasonal cycle, Hallam Tennyson has this to say:

My father made this further manuscript note on another phase of the unity of the poem. "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.<sup>131</sup>

---

<sup>128</sup> Steane, p. 127.

<sup>129</sup> Buckley, p. 173.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> II, 133.

Buckley states that Arthur, symbolic perhaps of a "simple personification of conscience," carries in the poems the banner of the soul in the war of "Sense and Soul."<sup>132</sup> While the king remains a shadowy figure, in the last idyll he is more thoroughly himself than he could ever be in actuality, a phantom figure "whiter than the mist that all day long/ Has held the field of battle."

In addition to his constant evocation of natural simile and symbol, Tennyson, as has already been indicated in this study, freely employs the symbolic colors of red and white. Early the Lady of the Lake, "Clothed in white samite," entrusts the sword to Arthur; the knights attendant to the king's wedding array themselves in "stainless white" and "the world is white with May." The red motif is flaunted by the brothers of Death, and the "deep-hued and many folded rose" symbolizes Guinevere's faithlessness. To this red motif Tennyson associates the frequent animal imagery that relates undisciplined human passion to "nature red in tooth and claw"--the beasts that threatened the kingdom of Leodogran, the brute passions of Pelleas likened by Ettarre to the dog kicked but still returning. Edyrn, against whom Geraint contends, pridefully calls himself a sparrow-hawk. Isolt yields to Tristram, recognizing him nevertheless as "grown wild beast thyself."

---

<sup>132</sup>Buckley, p. 176.



Modred, "a subtle beast/ . . . Couchant with his eyes upon the throne,/ Ready to spring," has a "narrow foxy face,"<sup>133</sup> the imagery reminiscent of Maud's rabbit-faced lover.

A new opulence of style, distinct from the tremulous tones of "The Lady of Shalott" and the laborious effort of In Memoriam, a style of sustained sweetness and luxuriant music characterizes the verse of the Idylls, of the most perfect that Tennyson ever produced. To his continuing quest for scenery and imagery nature was an ever-willing donor. He pursued the harmony of words; she supplied the felicity of appropriate imagery.

---

<sup>133</sup>Ibid., pp. 184-86.

CHAPTER II  
NATURE AND MOOD

Tennyson was, of all English poets, probably the most conscious artist.<sup>1</sup> "Unparalleled craftsman and virtuoso of sound,"<sup>2</sup> he never tired of making use of natural scenery to evoke a mood or "art-emotion"<sup>3</sup> through verses "encrusted with beauty and rich in sound."<sup>4</sup> As he matured, he developed artistically as well as in his awareness of human problems and public issues, but the strongest impetus of his poetry, "his sadness, the yearning, and the wonder,"<sup>5</sup> had their roots in the sensibility of the child and the youth, nurtured by the experience of living. Endowed with an uncommon appreciation of the beauty of landscape and seascape, all nature, in fact, he was not in accord with Emerson's opinion that "only to youth the Spring is Spring."<sup>6</sup> His own response in 1892, "For age does feel the joy of Spring, though age can only crawl over the bridge while youth skips the brook,"<sup>7</sup> was one more affirmation of

---

<sup>1</sup>William Clyde DeVane and Mable Phillips DeVane, eds., Selections from Tennyson (New York, 1940), p. xx.

<sup>2</sup>Rausen, p. xi.

<sup>3</sup>McLuhan, p. 69.

<sup>4</sup>DeVane, p. xxi.

<sup>5</sup>Buckley, p. 21.

<sup>6</sup>Nicolson, p. 219.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

the poet's lifelong observation of nature.

Testimony to his ardor and to his association of nature and mood in his poetry is the early "Ode to Memory," attributed to Alfred in the 1827 collection, "Poems by Two Brothers." Of nostalgic mood, fond recollections and reflections on the passing of time, and reminiscent surely of nature as the poet knew her in Lincolnshire, memory he likens lovingly to the "dewy dawn," the maid on whose locks are "overflowing blooms, and earliest shoots of orient green." Her he entreats to

Come from the woods that belt the gray hill-side  
The seven elms, the poplars four  
That stand beside my father's door,  
And chiefly from the brook that loves  
To purl o'er matted cress and ribbed sand,  
Or dimple in the dark of rushy coves,  
Drawing into his narrow earthen urn,  
    In every elbow and turn,  
The filter'd tribute of the rough woodland.

In sentimental mood nature's beauties are invoked in verses recalling the herbaceous garden of the rectory with its

plaited alleys of the trailing rose,  
Long alleys falling down to twilight grots  
Or opening upon level plots  
Of crowned lilies, standing near  
Purple-spiked lavender. . .

In the creation through nature of a particular mood Tennyson was never more effective than in "Song" ("A spirit haunts the year's last hours," 1830 volume), another of the many poems which show the impression that the natural setting of his boyhood home made on him. Written

on the lawn at Somersby, in the shade of elms and larch and sycamore trees, the poem describes the rectory garden in such "a haunting word picture of the effect of the departing year on the landscape that it is not surprising to learn that Edgar Allen Poe was extravagant in his admiration for this poem."<sup>8</sup> Exquisitely lyrical, the song transfers to the soul of a dying garden the poet's characteristic melancholy<sup>9</sup> in verses that Nicolson calls "the most purely original in all Tennyson's Nature poetry."<sup>10</sup>

A spirit haunts the year's last hours  
 Dwelling amid these yellowing bowers;  
                   To himself he talks;  
 For at eventide, listening earnestly,  
 To his work you may hear him sob and sigh  
                   In the walks;  
 Earthward he boweth the heavy stalks  
 Of the mouldering flowers.  
 Heavily hangs the broad sunflower  
                   Over its grave i' the earth so chilly;  
 Heavily hangs the hollyhock,  
                   Heavily hangs the tiger-lily.

That Tennyson was expert in the delineation of specific moods is especially apparent in "Mariana" (1830), a sombre ballad typical of his early luxuriance. From the first line of the initial stanza the poet sets in nature the distressful atmosphere of self-indulgent melancholy that pervades the poem "with its unity of gloomy emotion."<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup>Marshall, p. 36.

<sup>9</sup>Buckley, p. 37.

<sup>10</sup>P. 99.

<sup>11</sup>Nicolson, p. 128.

He uses the "glooming flats," the poplar, and the "rounding gray" of native Lincolnshire to create a mood of utter weariness and despair, the house "black-crusted, rusted," symbolic of the maiden's desertion by her lover. Throughout the seven stanzas of the poem this mood is maintained as ideas merge with landscape--dark shadows on "black moss, black fenland waters, black levels of sodden plain."<sup>12</sup> Bats flit to the sound of shrill winds as a low moon greets the sinking sunbeams, and the gnarled tree outside Mariana's window casts its shadow across her forsaken bed. Certainly the natural elements support the melancholy attitude in these verses of unique Tennysonian quality:

With blackest moss the flower-plots  
 Were thickly crusted, one and all:  
 The rusted nails fell from the knots  
 That held the pear to the gable-wall.  
 The broken sheds look'd sad and strange:  
 Uplifted was the clinking latch;  
 Weeded and worn the ancient thatch  
 Upon the lonely, moated grange.  
 She only said, "My life is dreary,  
 He cometh not," she said;  
 She said, I am aweary, aweary,  
 I would that I were dead!"

The mood of "dreary lassitude"<sup>13</sup> and "moaning dirge"<sup>14</sup> portends catastrophe with its "weary," "dreary" reiterations and gloomy descriptions.<sup>15</sup> As in the theme-related "Oriana"

---

<sup>12</sup>Lucas, p. 21.

<sup>13</sup>Fausset, p. 30.

<sup>14</sup>Hallam Tennyson, I, 98.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

of the same period, "When the long dun wolds are ribb'd with snow,/ And loud the Norland whirlwinds blow," unrestrained pathos and woeful desperation are "word-music tuned to mood and nature where a fantastic love-sickness haunts a drooping landscape."<sup>16</sup> The mournful lover rides "a weary, weary way" after plighting his troth "In the yew wood black as night" to faithless Oriana.

The desolation of landscape in "Mariana" is more impressive than the narrative, to the point that the suffering woman may be overlooked. George Marshall quotes George Brimley in an extreme observation of this danger:

"the woman who suffers is vague and indistinct; we have no interest in her, because we know nothing about her story or herself in detail; she is not a wronged and deserted woman, but an abstract generalization of wronged and deserted womanhood; all the individuality is bestowed upon the landscape in which she is placed."<sup>17</sup>

In Victorian Poetry and Poetics is this comment, reinforcing the observation quoted above: "In 'Mariana,' ostensibly a ballad, there is no development of character or even of narrative; such elements have given way to an intense concentration on arousing the sense of lonely remoteness and decay."<sup>18</sup> Mood and natural environment are in complete harmony.

---

<sup>16</sup>Fausset, p. 30.

<sup>17</sup>Marshall, p. 29.

<sup>18</sup>Houghton and Stange, p. 4.

"Mariana in the South" (1833; extensively altered in the 1842 collection) is "a pendant to the 'Mariana' of the previous volume."<sup>19</sup> The two "Marianas" depict in different environment stark loneliness. Like "Oriana," they are poems of natural scenery rather than human passion, the prevailing mood set in landscape. The loneliness of the second "Mariana" is even less essential than that of the first since Tennyson entered less personally into the feelings of the maiden, placing emphasis now on the scenery of southern France, as opposed to his native Lincolnshire, setting of the 1830-32 "Mariana." Hallam Tennyson says that his father conceived the idea for "Mariana in the South" when he was travelling in southern France between Narbonne and Perpignan.<sup>20</sup> In this regard the later poem has frequently been called too picturesque, almost excessively artificial; it is easy to lose the woman amidst the scenery. But she is there, and Tennyson skillfully combines her desolation with oppressive heat and depressing, sterile landscape. These lines from "Mariana in the South" convey the unhappy mood:

With one black shadow at its feet,  
 The house thro' all the level shines,  
 Close-latticed to the brooding heat,  
 And silent in its dusty vines:  
 A faint-blue ridge upon the right,  
     An empty river-bed before,  
     And shallows on a distant shore,

---

<sup>19</sup>Marshall, p. 60.

<sup>20</sup>I, 117.

But 'Ave Mary,' made she moan,  
 And 'Ave Mary,' night and morn,  
 And 'Ah,' she sang, 'to be all alone,  
 To live forgotten, and love forlorn.'

In contrast to the poignant but unselected detail of the earlier "Mariana," suggestive of dreams, disappointment and death, in the later poem is the single magnificent vision of the house "with one black shadow at its feet . . . and silent in its dusty vines." Details of wasteland landscape--"glaring sand" and "dusty-white" river bed--are added, with "stony drought and steaming salt." Elizabeth Waterston notes the emergence of yellow as the color of grief, the time of loneliness the eventide, "'a sound as of the sea' as Hesper rises, symbol of changeless love. In the ocean and the evening star Tennyson found realities which would evoke universal response."<sup>21</sup> In both the "Marianas" sorrow and frustration, even the oblivion awaiting the heroines, are submerged in the beauty of "decaying nature,"<sup>22</sup> as the poet abandons himself to the enchantments of mood in landscape.

Of serious personal mood and greater depth is the development in Tennyson's mind of the conflict between life and death expressed in "The Two Voices," originally titled "Thoughts of a Suicide" (1833-34). The argument of the poem, which equates his agonizing mood of miserable doubts, grief and emotion during the dark months following the

---

<sup>21</sup>Loc. cit., p. 121.

<sup>22</sup>Smith, p. 30.



death of Arthur Hallam, "proceeds through the long night of the soul in a darkness which is the very image of despair."<sup>23</sup> As his lonely, frightened spirit crouches over thoughts of death,<sup>24</sup> the voice of temptation, "his weaker self,"<sup>25</sup> declares in terms of nature his mortal worthlessness, that without him "Not less the bee would range her cells,/ The furzy prickle fire the dells." Hope and courage are gradually restored, nevertheless, and within the poet's heart strength rises finally "like a rainbow from the shower." Optimism is apparent in the height and light of the rainbow as "every cloud, that spreads above/ And veileth love, itself is love."

Buckley observes that "As the darkness lifts, the defeated voice turns its last irony against the new day: 'Behold it is the Sabbath morn.'"<sup>26</sup> Firm resolution manifests itself as a personal declaration by the second voice in an animated yet quiet affirmation of joyous "Wordsworthian landscape."<sup>27</sup>

And forth into the fields I went,  
 And Nature's living motion lent  
 The pulse of hope to discontent.

. . .

---

<sup>23</sup>Buckley, p. 63.

<sup>24</sup>Chew, p. 420.

<sup>25</sup>Nicolson, p. 125.

<sup>26</sup>Buckley, p. 64.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

I wonder'd while I paced along;  
 The woods were fill'd so full with song,  
 There seem'd no room for sense of wrong.

While the endurance of nature despite man's mortal weaknesses is obvious in the poem, the mood soars "in living motion" and "the pulse of hope," and one feels the optimism that is seeping back through the earlier uncertainty and despair. There is a reawakening of individual ego after the self-effacing plunge into landscape which expresses the personal melancholy and the eventual social optimism reflected by Tennyson.<sup>28</sup> Spedding notes in Tennyson's treatment "the genuine growth of nature, having its root deep in the pensive heart, a heart accustomed to meditate earnestly and feel truly upon the prime duties and interests of man."<sup>29</sup>

"Ulysses," also written in the 1833 period of depression and meditative mood that followed Hallam's death, was published in 1842, "clearly the most vigorously assertive of the poems" occasioned by the loss of the poet's friend.<sup>30</sup> As in "Break, Break, Break," the "Morte d'Arthur" and "Tithonus," the lyrics of "Ulysses convey profound and genuine emotion superbly expressed.

The "idle king," Ulysses, his restless mood embodied in "barren crags," of insatiable desire to find fulfilment

---

<sup>28</sup>Nicolson, p. 126.

<sup>29</sup>Hallam Tennyson, I, 193.

<sup>30</sup>Buckley, p. 60.



of his friend.<sup>34</sup> The aged protagonist, antithesis of Ulysses, on whom Eos, goddess of the dawn, has bestowed the gift of immortality, yet not youth, lives bowed down by the burden of time. Unable to enjoy "kisses balmy than half-opening buds of April," the distressful mortal prays now for the serenity of death while sympathetic nature reflects his peculiar plight. Her creatures and her plants may die--

The woods decay, the woods decay and fall,  
The vapors weep their burthen to the ground;  
Man comes and tills the field and lies beneath  
And after many a summer dies the swan.  
Me only cruel immortality  
Consumes.

The dewy vapors drop their burden on welcoming earth, but Tithonus may only bend longingly toward the "grassy barrows of the happier dead," while eternal nature continues her renewal, "morn by morn." The poet reflects in her his own mood of yearning for escape from purposeless reality and frustration.<sup>35</sup>

The poetry of the 1842 volumes, the second containing the "English Idyls," as Tennyson called them,<sup>36</sup> captures particularly the spirit of rural England with "a greater reliance for effect upon the simplicity of nature"<sup>37</sup> and rus-

---

<sup>34</sup>Irving Ribner and Harry Morris, Poetry, A Critical and Historical Introduction (Glenview, 1962), p. 339.

<sup>35</sup>Buckley, p. 62.

<sup>36</sup>Scaife, p. 12.

<sup>37</sup>Fausset, p. 109.

tic scenery. While the 1842 collection embraces more interests--answers for the questioner of God; phrases "coined of close observation" for the inquisitive naturalist; "a range of pretty moods" for the lover; and for the artist, "careful landscapes . . . rich in ripe pastures, heavy foliage, well-kept gardens"<sup>38</sup>--the poems comprise, "above all, a comfortable book. . . . Nature, hiding her fangs, pretended to a chaste refinement and an indolent purity."<sup>39</sup>

The English idyl, "Dora" (first published in Poems, 1842), unlike Tennyson's more characteristic poetry is noticeably bare, a pastoral less adorned by natural imagery in the rustic farmland landscape. The fact that death comes at harvest time, and that the mood of uncertainty and sorrow is emphasized and re-emphasized by the line, "And the sun fell, and all the land was dark," are the most Tennysonian characteristics of the poem. Sad in content, the idyl is also sad in quality when one considers the capabilities of the poet. Nature is charmingly portrayed, but without the strength and intensity as in, for example, the Idylls of the King, in which the cycle of the seasons is so significantly poetized.

Another English idyl, "Audley Court," one of Tennyson's shorter pastoral poems, is a vignette of a pleasant picnic by the sea, perhaps "suggested by Abbey Park in Torquay,

---

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

which Tennyson considered in old days the loveliest sea village in England.<sup>40</sup> Replete with description of the "stillness of the beach" and "the dying ebb that faintly lipp'd the flat red granite," the poem moves rapidly through "many a sweep of meadow" to a picnic site "on a slope of orchard." Old friends reminisce, argue, and enjoy each other until

ere the night we rose,  
And saunter'd home beneath a moon that  
  just  
In crescent, dimly rain'd about the leaf  
Twilights of airy silver, till we reach'd  
The limit of the hills; and as we sank  
From rock to rock upon the glooming  
  quay,  
The town was hush'd beneath us . . .

For all the quiet quaintness, fanciful natural similes, and dim prettiness of this and other "English Idyls," something of the natural ecstasy and fragility of the earlier poems is missing in these lyrical pictures of mood or character.<sup>41</sup> Lovely passages like the foregoing nevertheless illustrate Tennyson's indulgence in landscape, especially English landscape or seascape, his veritable "kinship with the English school of landscape painters."<sup>42</sup>

The lyrics of "Audley Court" are especially beautiful, forerunners of The Princess with its "Swallow Song," also sung at a picnic. George Marshall writes that the real

---

<sup>40</sup>Marshall, p. 91.

<sup>41</sup>Fausset, p. 110.

<sup>42</sup>Chew, p. xxiv.

"germ of the poem" is in the third line from the last in the final text, "Sole star of phosphorescence in the calm," inserted in the poem in 1872, relating to a little harbour buoy in the "oily calm" of the dark sea, which particularly impressed Tennyson one night when he was coming down from the hill above.<sup>43</sup>

After 1842 Tennyson began to address his poetic efforts more seriously to contemporary problems, still decorative in nature, but supportive of his prevailing faith in man's progress. Treating of the part of man and woman, separately and together, in the progress of mankind,<sup>44</sup> and specifically his response to the question of woman's rights, The Princess, called by Buckley "virtually another English idyl,"<sup>45</sup> appeared in 1847, enlarged in successive editions to 1853. Backdrop for maiden pioneers, nature is a picturesque companion to the narrative of this, Tennyson's first long poem. Written in Switzerland, scenic verses luxuriantly lyrical, set forth an optimistic mood as the poet relies on "Mountains and valleys, dancing torrents, the sweet sounds of the moaning doves and murmuring bees, everything in harmony and a proper setting for culminating love."<sup>46</sup> At opposite extremes of mood from the "Marianas" and "Oriana,"

---

<sup>43</sup>Marshall, p. 91.

<sup>44</sup>DeVane, p. xviii.

<sup>45</sup>P. 96.

<sup>46</sup>Charles Tennyson, p. 221.

nature here, too, dominates in a profusion of beauty the sevenfold tale told at a country party on the broad lawns of the abbey-ruin of Sir Walter Vivian. There catalyst Lilia, "A rosebud set with little wilful thorns," the "little hearth flower" of idealistic vision of woman's place in society, provokes the romantic fantasy, The Princess, told in a chain-story fashion by male collegians. The Lady Ida, unwilling to be wed to her betrothed whose sweet thoughts of her swarm "as bees about their queen," founds a "flowery Academy amid Elysian lawns and fills it with 'Gardner's Daughters,' drinking for a season at the crystal fountain of abstract knowledge."<sup>47</sup> Not living women these, but "a field of daffodils, of 'rosy blondes,' fresh and glowing."<sup>48</sup> The poem luxuriates in description of the college girls who "In colors gayer than the morning mist" now bedeck the halls like flowers, or "like morning doves/ . . . Sun their milky bosoms on the thatch." Ida's poetic request for blessing is a familiar one, reflecting in the poet's love for the sea "the love of man and woman and the role of the child as token of that love."<sup>49</sup>

Sweet and low, sweet and low,  
 Wind of the western sea,  
 Low, low, breathe and blow,  
 Wind of the western sea!

---

<sup>47</sup>Fausset, p. 131.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>Buckley, p. 100.



Over the rolling waters go,  
 Come from the dying moon, and blow,  
     Blow him again to me;  
 While my little one, while my pretty one  
     sleeps.

Continuing his recourse to suggestive nature the poet describes the new day--"Morn in the white wake of the morning star/ Came furrowing all the orient into gold," as morning and the East relate once more perhaps to hope. Scenic vistas of "a bridge of pinewood crossing . . . On flowery levels underneath the crag"; a mountain sunset when the sun "Grew broader toward his death and fell, and all/ The rosy heights came out above the lawns," add to the contrast of "ambrosial gloom" that settles uncertainly with the evening tide on "lean and wrinkled precipices" and "coppice feather'd chasms."

The most sublime heights of the poem are the songs inserted between the cantos, especially "Tears, idle Tears," written in the yellowing autumn at Tintern Abbey, "full . . . of bygone memories."<sup>50</sup> Of especial rhythm and melody, the poet considered as among his best works the beautiful lyrics, "Come Down, O Maid, From Yonder Mountain Height," which he believed accurately "descriptive of the waste Alpine heights and gorges, and of the sweet, rich valleys below."<sup>51</sup> His acutely "keen sensibilities to the gathering of impressions

---

<sup>50</sup>Hallam Tennyson, I, 252.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

of men and Nature"<sup>52</sup> are equally apparent in the "Swallow Song," "Ask me no More," "Now Sleeps the Crimson Petal, Now the White," all of these of "perennial loveliness" and separable from their context.<sup>53</sup> These verses are an unsurpassed delicacy in acknowledged love:

Now sleeps the crimson petal, now the white,  
Nor waves the cypress in the palace walk;  
Nor winks the gold fin in the porphyry font.  
The fire-fly wakens; waken thou with me.

That Tennyson's particular recourse to nature was truly inspirational is reaffirmed in Hallam Tennyson's Memoir when he describes his father's climb in August, 1861, with some friends, to the Lac de Gaube, "a blue, still lake among fir woods" in the Pyrenees. There the poet quoted "the simile of the stately pine in The Princess, which he had made from a pine here on an island in between two cataracts."<sup>54</sup> More pines had grown beside the solitary one of years before, but none more magnificent than that of the representation of proud Ida

standing like a stately pine  
Set in a cataract on an island crag,  
When storm is on the heights, and right and left  
Suck'd from the dark heart of the long hills roll  
The torrents, dash'd to the vale; and yet her will  
Bred will in me to overcome it or fall.

Intensifying the Princess Ida's self-disgust for fe-

<sup>52</sup>Charles Tennyson, p. 219.

<sup>53</sup>Chew, p. xxviii.

<sup>54</sup>I, 475.

male weakness, Tennyson reverts to the usual dark setting in nature for such a mood as he envisions

a great black cloud  
 Drag inward from the deeps, a wall of night,  
 Blot out the slope of sea from verge to shore,  
 And suck the blinding splendor from the sand,  
 And quenching lake by lake and tarn by tarn  
 Expunge the world.

These lines Hallam Tennyson says were suggested to his father by the view of an approaching storm from the top of Snowdon.<sup>55</sup>

The conclusion of the poem, the poet's description of the countryside, is a vision of tranquillity in landscape, all nature in tune with mood.

The happy valleys, half in light and half  
 Far-shadowing from the west, a land of peace;  
 Gray halls alone among their massive groves,  
 Trim hamlets; here and there a rustic tower  
 Half-lost in belts of hop and breadths of wheat;  
 The shimmering glimpses of a stream; the seas  
 A red sail, or a white; and far beyond,  
 Imagined more than seen, the skirts of France.

It is interesting to note Tennyson's reply in 1882 to a notice by Dawson of Montreal in which the reviewer suggested the influence of Wordsworth or Shelley on certain natural passages. The poet wrote in rebuttal:

I wholly disagree. There was a period in my life when I was an artist. Turner, for instance, takes rough sketches of landscape, etc., in order to work them eventually into some great picture, so I was in the habit of chronicling, in four or five words or more, whatever might strike me as pictur-

---

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 259.

esque in Nature. I never put these down,  
and many and many a line has gone away on  
the north wind, but some remain . . .<sup>56</sup>

The "Enoch Arden" volume of 1864 was first titled "Idyls of the Hearth." Containing in addition to "Enoch Arden," "Alymer's Field," "The Grandmother," "Sea Dreams," "The Northern Farmer," "Tithonus," "The Sailor Boy," "The Flower," "Welcome to Alexandra" and the "Dedication," the presence of nature is obvious even in some of the titles. "Enoch Arden" was written in "a little summer-house in the meadow called Maiden's Croft, looking over Freshwater Bay and toward the downs."<sup>57</sup> The poet's pleasure in nature and in the sea in all its moods is particularly apparent in this poem with "its riot of tropic landscape, its bleak English winter-day with the robin piping from a dead-leaved tree."<sup>58</sup> Harold Nicolson declares that Tennyson "is at his best . . . in the flow of direct and simple narrative, as in the nine initial lines with which the scenery of the sea village is sketched as the introduction to 'Enoch Arden.'"<sup>59</sup>

Long lines of cliff breaking have left a  
  chasm  
And in the chasm are foam and yellow  
  sands;  
Beyond, red roofs about a narrow wharf  
In cluster; then a moulder'd church; and  
  higher  
A long street climbs to one tall-tower'd  
  mill;

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., pp. 256-57.

<sup>57</sup>Hallam Tennyson, II, 7.

<sup>58</sup>Auden, p. 27.

<sup>59</sup>p. 271.

And high in heaven behind it a gray down  
 With Danish barrows; and a hazelwood,  
 Its autumn nutters haunted, flourishes  
 Green in a cuplike hollow of the down.

Called by Matthew Arnold "perhaps the best thing Tennyson has done,"<sup>60</sup> the poem is rich in description of tropical scenery, of the seashore and the sea, from the "castles of dissolving sand" along "that breaker-beaten coast" to the crash of ruinous breakers on a lonely sea, the seaman's shelter "a seaward gazing mountain-gorge."

A far cry from "the new warmth of life's ascending sun" of Enoch's youth, the atmosphere surrounding the home-coming of the sailor long shipwrecked among island "palms and ferns and precipices," is one of foreboding in the chill November afternoon. His personal tragedy is suggested by these verses.

On the high-naked tree the robin piped  
 Disconsolate, and thro' the dripping haze  
 The dead weight of the dead leaf bore it  
 down;  
 Thicker the drizzle grew, deeper the gloom.

Enoch's prayer for death is likened to the dawning that reveals "thro' the gray skirts of a lifting squall" hope and rescue to a stranded ship, yet

His resolve  
 Upbore him and firm faith and evermore  
 Prayer from a living source within the will  
 And beating up thro' all the bitter world,  
 Like fountains of sweet water in the sea  
 Kept him a living soul.

In the character of Enoch Tennyson reveals his own

---

<sup>60</sup>Marshall, p. 156.

passionate love of nature and the sea, reiterated poetically many times. Hallam says that his father loved the sea

as much as any sailor and knew all its moods whether on the shore or in mid-ocean. . . . This delight in the sea more especially comes out in such poems as "Enoch Arden," "Ulysses," . . . "Sea Dreams," Maud, "Break, Break, Break," and "Crossing the Bar," and I remember well his glory in having made these lines in "Boadicea"--

Fear not, isle of blowing woodland, isle  
of silvery parapets!  
Thine the liberty, thine the glory, thine  
the deeds to be celebrated,  
Thine the myriad-rolling ocean, light and  
shadow illimitable . . . <sup>61</sup>

In this, as in his other poetry, Tennyson's close observation of nature complements the theme so that scenery and narrative are interreacting. Even as in "Locksley Hall" he acknowledges, "Nay, but Nature brings thee solace," so in "Enoch Arden" "There came so loud a calling of the sea," and the old sailor found his peace.

Like "Enoch Arden," "Aylmer's Field," first published in the 1864 volume, was written at Farringford. Setting for the poem is the natural scenery around Lushington Home, Park House, near Maidstone, Kent.<sup>62</sup> Hallam Tennyson writes that his father

often pointed out how hard he had found such and such a passage . . . the lawyer at work in his chambers; the pompous old Aylmer in his wrath; the suicide. He liked his own descriptions of English landscape, and of cottages covered with creepers, and especially,

---

<sup>61</sup>Hallam Tennyson, II, 7.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 147.

the passage about the Traveller's joy.<sup>63</sup>

Early in the poem Tennyson introduces "a grizzled cripple . . . in a waste field alone," from whom the story supposedly derived. It is interesting to note the harshness and the desolation of the landscape under the "sickly sun" that the poet associates with this pathetic individual, just as, conversely, in the developing narrative of young lovers the setting is one of gentle tranquillity among the cottage-gardens, scenery appropriate to the mood.

here was one that, summer-blanch'd  
Was parcel-bearded with the traveller's  
joy  
In autumn, parcel ivy-clad; and here  
The warm-blue breathings of a hidden hearth  
Broke from a bower of vine and honey-suckle;  
One look'd all rosetree, and another wore  
A close-set robe of jasmine sown with stars:  
This had a rosy sea of gillyflowers  
About it; this, a milky-way on earth,  
Like visions in the Northern dreamer's  
heavens,  
A lily-avenue climbing to the doors;  
One, almost to the martin-haunted eaves  
A summer burial deep in hollyhocks;  
Each, its own charm; and Edith's every-  
where . . .

Described by the Quarterly Review as "full of wonderful beauty in places,"<sup>64</sup> the poem is nevertheless written in "acid, immensely vigorous tones,"<sup>65</sup> treating again, as in Maud and "Locksley Hall," the subject of lovers parted first by family pride, then by death. Perhaps the narrative is more

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

<sup>64</sup>Alfred Tennyson, W. J. Rolfe, ed., p. 240.

<sup>65</sup>Steane, p. 129.

effective in this instance because of the absence of the "strain of high-pitched, self-pitying complaint."<sup>66</sup> There is a feeling of moral indignation on the part of the poet, a driving energy that impels the rhyme, "something never remotely felt in the Idylls."<sup>67</sup> The stern blight of desecrated affection appears more deadly and more comprehensive than in the former pieces, love, in this instance, trampled upon in exquisite pain by pride and selfishness.<sup>68</sup> Contrary to the emotions seething in the village, the setting is

A land of hops and poppy-mingled corn,  
Little about it stirring save a brook!  
A sleepy land, where under the same wheel  
The same old rut would deepen year by year.

So does the rut of prejudice and hatred deepen as the childhood love of Leolin and Edith, their conscious passion yet unborn, lies "hidden as the music of the moon/ Sleeps in the plain eggs of the nightingale." In continuing terms of nature Tennyson describes Sir Aylmer's stormy banishment of Leolin, "beneath a pale and unimpassioned moon," to the "stunted, sunless life" of his brother Averill, the Rector. Reminiscent of Maud, the "milk-white fawn," Edith becomes "the very whitest lamb" of all the fold, an "innocent hare," "a hunted creature" before the materialistic hunters who pursue her. The rain of heaven enhances the lovers' grief "under the tall pines/ That darkened all the northward of her Hall,"

---

<sup>66</sup>Ibid.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid.

<sup>68</sup>Peter Bayne, from Alfred Tennyson, Rolfe, ed., p. 240.



the roaring of the trees an angry echo of Sir Aylmer's wrathful mood. Their trysting place, an ancient oak--

Once grove-like, each huge arm a tree, but now  
The broken base of a black tower, a cave  
Of touchwood, with a single flourishing spray--

discovered by Sir Aylmer, anticipates the distressful death of the hapless lovers eulogized in keeping with their sorrow, under nature's sheltering cloak.

Darkly that day rose.  
Autumn's mock sunshine of the faded woods  
Was all the life of it; for hard on these  
A breathless burthen of low-folded heavens  
Stifled and chill'd at once.

Steane expresses the opinion that generalities in "Aylmer's Field" give way to specific, imaginative image.<sup>69</sup> That the poem has all the strength of full maturity and creativity of a major poet is apparent in these final lines. Thus the landscape after the death of them who owned it all:

Then the great Hall was wholly broken down,  
And the broad woodland parcell'd into farms;  
And where the two contriv'd their daughter's good,  
Lies the hawk's cast, the mole has made his run,  
The hedgehog underneath the plantain bores,  
The rabbit fondles his own harmless face,  
The slow-worm creeps, and the thin weasel there  
Follows the mouse, and all is open field.

That Tennyson took all the while a loving note of nature<sup>70</sup> is clearly visible in his poetic range from her simplest minutiae to her most majestic creations-- from the

---

<sup>69</sup>Steane, p. 131.

<sup>70</sup>Hallam Tennyson, I, 414.

"dappled bells of the fox-glove," the "sudden scritchings of the jay," "the starling's tiny castanets," the familiar "sighing of the dune grasses," or a crumpled poppy leaf freed from its sheath--<sup>71</sup> to the thunderous ocean, sublimation of the poet's love.

Nowhere is the significance of nature's tender creatures more profound than in the six searching lines of "Flower in the Crannied Wall":

Flower in the crannied wall,  
I pluck you out of the crannies,  
I hold you here, root and all, in my hand,  
Little flower--but if I could understand  
What you are, root and all, and all in all,  
I should know what God and man is.

Obviously of questioning mood when he composed these verses, Tennyson was subjectively aware of nature's spirituality as he dealt with "the tiny . . . phenomena of the foreground" against the "illimitable background."<sup>72</sup> With discernment and inquiry he sought to comprehend the mysteries of heaven and earth as he addressed the tiny flower. Truly could the poet sing, "Hold thou, my friend, no lesser life in scorn,/ All nature is the womb where man is born."<sup>73</sup>

"The Throstle," beautiful in its happy unquestioning mood of certainty, is a song of optimism, token of the poet's faith in the renewal of returning time. There is

---

<sup>71</sup>Nicolson, p. 132.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., p. 279.

<sup>73</sup>Hallam Tennyson, II, 399.

nothing of dubious attitude in the promising verses, "Summer is coming, summer is coming./ I know it, I know it, I know it."; more firmly reiterated, "Summer is coming, is coming, my dear,/ And all the winters are hidden."

Of more solemn vein, the affirmation of a lifetime of rapport with the sea, the song which is "perhaps the finest of all his references to the sea,"<sup>74</sup> "Crossing the Bar," appeared in 1889 in Demeter and Other Poems. Profound testimony of his mood of hope and faith, and written as a hymn of thanksgiving for his recovery from a serious illness, the poem was inspired by the slow movement of Lyminster harbour-mouth.<sup>75</sup> Suggestive of an old superstition which "asserts that a tide 'moaning' as it ebbs across a harbor bar foretells a tragic voyage, still another superstition claims that men die only as the tide flows out to sea."<sup>76</sup> Tennyson relates his own passing to the ebbing tide, his hope for a peaceful twilight exquisitely told in nature. His is the prayer to go in quiet dignity to his home across the bar.

Sunset and evening star,  
 And one clear call for me!  
 And may there be no moaning of the bar,  
 When I put out to sea.

But such a tide as moving seems asleep,  
 Too full for sound and foam,  
 When that which drew from out the bound-  
 less deep  
 Turns again home.

. . .

---

<sup>74</sup>Nicolson, p. 282.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid.

<sup>76</sup>Day, p. 29.

For tho' from out our bourne of Time and  
Place  
The flood may bear me far,  
I hope to see my Pilot face to face  
When I have crost the bar.

## CONCLUSION

We may conclude that the poetry of Tennyson is that of a true nature poet, emphasizing landscape, yet employing all nature's resources to develop and establish mood and symbolism. Backgrounds are compatible with narrative; word-music coordinates lyric and scene.

That nature had definite charm for him and that he was profoundly affected by her in the natural environment of quaint, roughly picturesque Lincolnshire, Farringford with its vistas of the sea, and Aldworth, behind which the various colors of the vegetation carpeted the moor like a garden of flowers,<sup>1</sup> is strikingly apparent in the nature and landscape of his poetry, expressive of his attitudes and emotions through a lifelong range of superb poetic composition.

Of particular interest is Tennyson's own declaration in "The Palace of Art,"<sup>2</sup> in which he affirms his especial rapport with nature in all her moods. His reliance on her is eloquently expressed in these pleading lines, "O leave not thou thy son forlorn/ Teach me, great nature, make me live."<sup>3</sup> Here one sees the essence of Tennyson's love; nature provided him with insight and inspiration and,

---

<sup>1</sup>Hallam Tennyson, II, 413.

<sup>2</sup>Quoted in Chapter I, this paper, pp. 17-18.

<sup>3</sup>Hallam Tennyson, I, 123.

as in "Enoch Arden," "Like fountains of sweet water in the sea/ Kept him a living soul."

To the impressions of his son Hallam and his nephew Charles are added established critical opinions quoted in this study, from Paull Franklin Baum, H. H. McLuhan, John Killham, Elizabeth Hillman Waterston, George Marshall, Jr., T. S. Eliot and others. According to Scaife, Tennyson "possessed the creative craftsmanship" for the "fullest expression of the poetic ideal."<sup>4</sup> DeVane says that Tennyson was a poet "endowed with an unusual sensibility toward the beauty of landscape and seascape."<sup>5</sup> F. L. Lucas declares that "No poet has caught with clearer eye that quiet beauty of English landscape, sky and sea--a beauty that does not strive nor cry."<sup>6</sup> Edward Fitzgerald affirms the poet's love of setting his subjects in landscape or environment completely in harmony with the subject of the poem.<sup>7</sup> Nicolson calls "Tennyson's essentially emotional attitude towards Nature, his powers of observation and portrayal . . . of great value and interest";<sup>8</sup> his poetry he compares to "one clear harp in diverse tones."<sup>9</sup>

The Edinburgh for April, 1843, carried a review by

---

<sup>4</sup>P. 93.

<sup>5</sup>P. sviii.

<sup>6</sup>P. 30.

<sup>7</sup>Hallam Tennyson, I, 117.

<sup>8</sup>P. 280.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 229.

Spedding of Tennyson's poetry, witnessing the poet's "'greater reliance for effect upon the simplicity of nature.'"<sup>10</sup>

He was ever cognizant of the herbaceous borders at Somersby, never unaware of the pines, the lupins, and the waterfalls at Caunteretz; the waves breaking on the flat sands at Mablethorpe or the "thrift-enlivened" rocks at Tintagel were always clearly photographic in his mind."<sup>11</sup>

Tennyson's genuine ardor for nature pervades his poetry from the earlier, simpler poems to his most grand. His employment of her for mood-symbolism may be specifically illustrated. In the "Marianas" nature bespeaks despair; in "Ulysses" she ranges from despondency to optimism; the atmosphere of "The Lotus-Eaters" is one of languid ease; nature carries the mood of In Memoriam from initial despair through gradually rising optimism to spiritual gladness.

The early morning, sunny skies, natural heights, are tokens of optimism, as before Pelleas' victory; twilight, bad weather, desolation of landscape, symbolize foreboding, as in "The Last Tournament" and "Enoch Arden"; the west and eventide are symbols of distress and death as in "The Passing of Arthur"; Tennyson's special love of the sea is set in symbolism in "The Kraken," his mood expressed most profoundly in her in "Break, Break, Break," "Enoch Arden," and "Crossing

<sup>10</sup>Hallam Tennyson, I, 190.

<sup>11</sup>Nicolson, p. 236.

the Bar."

One sees the summation of the life of this great poet in nature. From youthful songs of "the brook flowing through his upland valley, of the 'ridg'd wolds' that rose above his home, of the mountain-glen and snowy summits of his early dreams," Tennyson progressed through all "the harmonies of nature, 'the warble of water,' and 'cataract music of falling torrents'"<sup>12</sup> through misty dawns and ebbing days. No matter the season, the temper of the weather, the beauty or the harshness of the landscape, his inspiration in nature never darkened. Nor did the early impression of the booming beetle and the humming bee, the glimmering moon, and the lispig throstle<sup>13</sup> ever leave him.

Taine says:

In Tennyson we find the close of an epoch; it was given to him to enjoy what had disturbed his predecessors; his poetry can be likened to a soft summer evening--the lines of the landscape are the same as in the day, but the glitter of the cupola is veiled, the flowers lift their heads refreshed, and the sun sinks calmly in the west, blending in its purple haze the woods and meadows which had glared so fiercely in the noonday heat.<sup>14</sup>

The poet who cried, "The wan moon is setting behind the white wave/ And time is setting for me, oh!"<sup>15</sup> was, to his last lucid moment, nature lover, nature poet.

---

<sup>12</sup>Hallam Tennyson, I, xiii.

<sup>13</sup>"Claribel," 1830 vol.

<sup>14</sup>P. 18.

<sup>15</sup>Hallam Tennyson, II, 399.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abrams, M. H., and others. The Norton Anthology of English Literature. New York: W. H. Norton and Co., 1968.
- Auden, W. H., ed. Selections from the Poems of Alfred Tennyson. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran and Co., 1944.
- Bradley, A. C. A Commentary on Tennyson's In Memoriam. London: Macmillan and Co., 1907.
- Brooke, Stopford A. Tennyson, His Art and Relation to Modern Life. London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1894.
- Buckley, Jerome Hamilton. Tennyson the Growth of a Poet. Cambridge: The Harvard University Press, 1961.
- Chew, Samuel C., ed. Tennyson and Representative Poems. New York: The Odyssey Press, 1941.
- Day, Martin S. History of English Literature, 1837 to the Present. Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., 1964.
- DeVane, William Clyde and Mable Phillips DeVane, eds. Selections from Tennyson. New York: F. S. Crofts and Co., 1940.
- Faverty, Frederic E. The Victorian Poets. Cambridge: The Harvard University Press, 1956.
- Fausset, Hugh I'Anson. Tennyson, A Modern Portrait. New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1923.
- Houghton, Walter, and G. Robert Stange. Victorian Poetry and Poetics. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1959.
- Johnson, E. D. H. The Alien Vision of Victorian Poetry. Hamden, Connecticut: Anchor Books, 1963.
- Killham, John, ed. Critical Essays on the Poetry of Tennyson. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964.
- Killham, John. Tennyson and the Princess. London: The Athlone Press, 1958.

- Long, W. J. English Literature. New York: Ginn and Co., 1945.
- Lounsbury, Thomas R. Life and Times of Tennyson. New York: Russell and Russell, Inc., 1962.
- Lucas, F. L. Tennyson. London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1966.
- Marshall, George O., Jr. A Tennyson Handbook. New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1963.
- Nicolson, Harold. Tennyson, Aspects of His Life and Poetry. London: Arrow Books, Ltd., 1960.
- Rausen, Ruth Greiner. Poems of Alfred, Lord Tennyson. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1964.
- Ribner, Irving and Harry Morris. Poetry, A Critical and Historical Introduction. Glenview, Illinois: Scott Foresman and Co., 1962.
- Scaife, C. H. O. The Poetry of Alfred Tennyson, An Essay in Appreciation. London: Cobden-Sanderson, 1930.
- Smith, Edward Elton. The Two Voices. Lincoln: The University of Nebraska Press, 1964.
- Steane, J. B. Tennyson. New York: Arco Publishing Co., 1969.
- Taine, H. A. History of English Literature. New York: H. Holt and Co., 1900.
- Tennyson, Alfred. The Poems of Tennyson. Edited by W. J. Rolfe. Cambridge edition. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1898.
- Tennyson, Charles. Alfred Tennyson. London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1950.
- Tennyson, Hallam. Alfred Tennyson, A Memoir by His Son. volumes. London: The Macmillan Co., 1897.

## VITA

Margery Moore Taylor is a native Richmonder. She was educated in the Public School system and received a B.A. degree from Westhampton College, University of Richmond, in 1955. She has done post-graduate work at the University of Virginia and the University of North Carolina. She produced the "Stories for Children" show on WTVR-TV from 1954 until 1958, and has subsequently taught at Saint Christopher's School, Thomas Jefferson High School, and the University of Richmond.

Mrs. Taylor is a member of Reveille Methodist Church.