

ALFRED TENNYSON'S
THE LOVER'S TALE:
AN INTERPRETATION

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ABSTRACT

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By

John Otter Briney

Tennyson's The Lover's Tale has generally been neglected by the critics. The poem is certainly curious, uneven, and ambiguous. Yet I firmly believe it should enjoy a considerably higher critical reputation than it now does, if only for the inferences about the developing Tennysonian psyche that the careful reader may draw from this puzzling narrative poem.

The story is that of Julian, a young poet who lives in idyllic isolation with his foster-sister, Camilla, near Lover's Bay. Camilla, one must understand, is a kind of Shelleyan epipsyche -- a solipsistic projection of Julian's own personality. She has her counterpart in the "fair fiend" of Shelley's Alastor who is also a manifestation of the Poet's anima; the vain pursuit of her leads the Alastor poet to an untimely grave. I submit that Tennyson, reading Shelley at Cambridge in the late 1820's, saw reflected in the Alastor Poet a facet of his own personality that Tennyson knew he must expunge, or mitigate, if he was to become a poet with a conscience and an aim.



Critics have suggested that it is the interplay between the "real" and the "Victorian" Tennyson that makes his poetry so fascinating; and this is unquestionably so. Yet I contend that this balance between withdrawal and commitment was a tenuous one, a balance far from easily achieved. Julian's story, then, is a symbolic account of Tennyson's own struggle to achieve this balance.

The isolated Lover's Bay is indeed an Eden for Julian and Camilla, and Tennyson masterfully adopts Miltonic theme and imagery to relate the expulsion of Julian from this paradise to the myth of the fortunate fall. For it is only through denial of godlike isolation (paradoxically, through separation from Camilla) that it is possible for Julian-Tennyson to achieve the socially-oriented point of view so necessary to the ideal Victorian poet.

Camilla rejects Julian for Lionel; and Julian is thus symbolically deprived of his Eden of self-centeredness. He is, in effect, deprived of the narcissistic element of his personality. Julian must now undergo symbolic baptism, a painful but lustrative "little death" in order to achieve full integration. Julian's ambivalent feelings are vividly embodied in a dream-trance sequence, which occurs just at the end of the poem's Part II. In this hallucinatory passage, Julian is, on the one hand, torn between his desire to cast Camilla from him and achieve rebirth, and, on the other, to "down welter" through the dark waters to oblivion.

But Julian does not drown; and, in his first socially-oriented act, he gives a solemn feast (echoing the Last Supper), turns Camilla over to Lionel, and rides away.

The ending of the poem is intriguingly ambiguous. Does Julian ride off to become a Victorian vatic poet? Or has his redemption been ironic, and does he ride into oblivion? Tennyson does not tell us. I submit that Tennyson (when he came to write the ending of the Tale) sometimes saw the world as corrupt beyond redemption; and if this were so, of what use would a Carlylean hero-poet be? Yet, there are other, more hopeful, inferences to be drawn: if Julian's fate is parallel to that of the hero of the Decameron story from which the poem is supposed to be drawn, he is allowed to perform a useful social function. However, Tennyson, baffled by the late Victorian Zeitgeist, could only end the poem ambiguously.



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Professor and Mrs. Elwood P. Lawrence, who loaned their home to my wife and myself while they were on sabbatical leave this year, can never, I know, fully be thanked. Not only did they provide a congenial ambience for my work, but Professor Lawrence was unstinting in his encouragement and cogent criticism.

Professor Sam S. Baskett, the third member of my graduate committee, has been a kind, a valued, and a supportive friend for nearly a decade now. I know Sam Baskett has no more use than I for the kind of mawkishness that appears to be impending -- so I shall let him off the hook right now.

Let me say, then, that each of these scholars has read this manuscript carefully and critically: whatever virtues it may have they are in large part responsible for; the errors are mine.

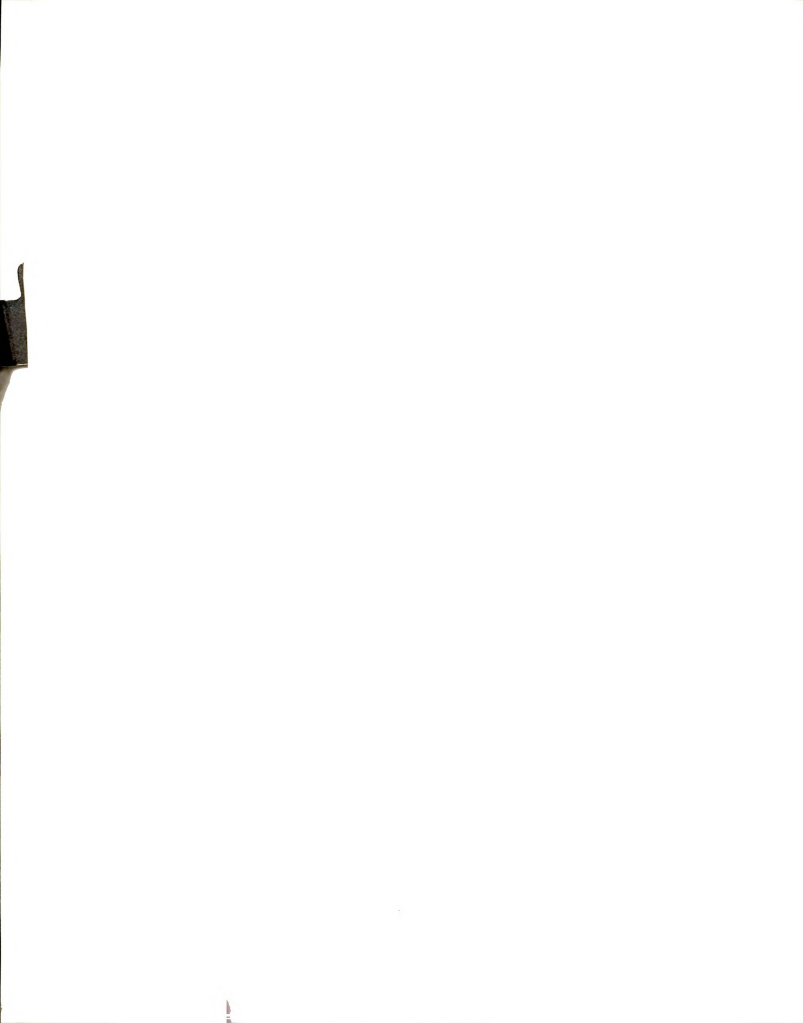


I must also thank my patient typist, Mrs. Mary Mendelsohn and the cooperative staff of the Tennyson Research Centre.

Finally, my gratitude to my wife, Mary Jane Briney, and my mother, Mrs. Russell Briney (no mean writer herself) is beyond words. This dissertation is dedicated to them both.

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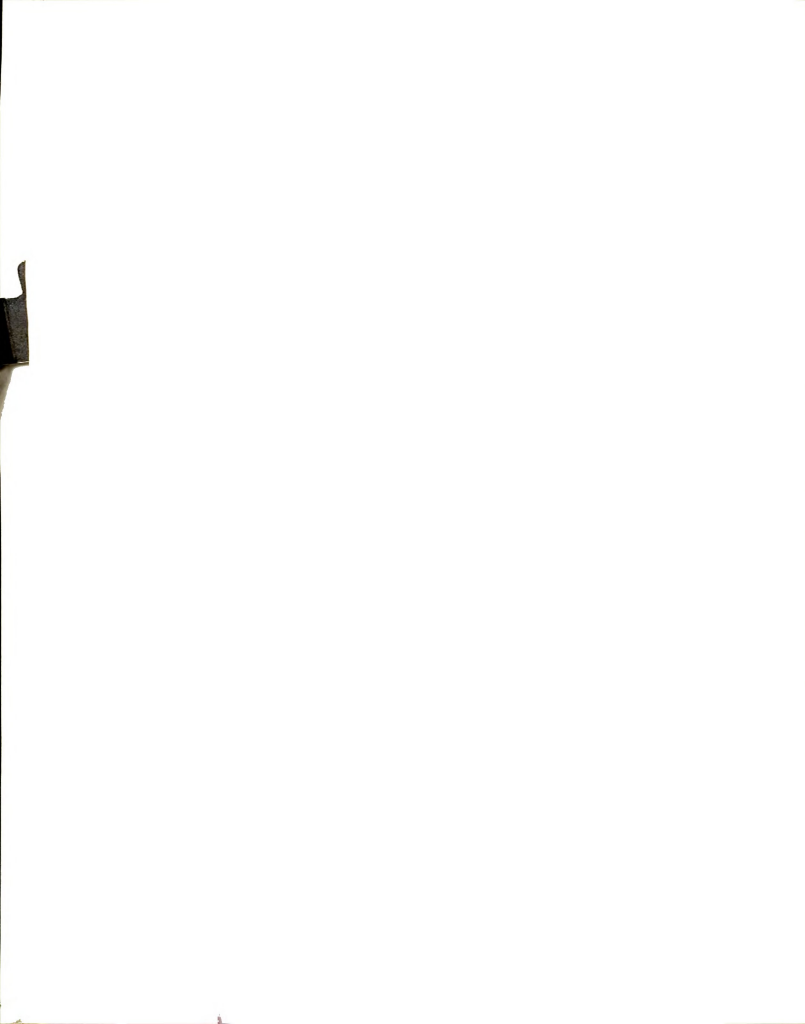


INTRODUCTION

i

Before entering upon this analysis of The Lover's Tale, let us briefly examine several critics' assessment of Tennyson's personality. For each of these men maintains that the Tennysonian self was to some extent a divided self, in which there was a definite tension between the opposites of withdrawal and social commitment. And this notion, as will soon be made clear, is central to a basic theme of this dissertation.

The notion of Tennyson as an almost schizoid figure -- tormented by the claims of "society" as opposed to some private inner poetic vision -- was given wide currency by Harold Nicolson's biocritical study of the poet published in the 1920's, at the height of the anti-Victorian reaction. Nicolson hypothesizes an erratic, lonely mystic of the Lincolnshire wolds and fens -- a figure capable of lyrics which, while often morbid, could set the wild echoes flying at least among the foothills of Olympus. Nicolson gives us a poet (whose true gift was to pipe as but the linnets sang) falling afoul of the priggish Apostles at Cambridge, and becoming, particularly after 1842, the sacer vates of the Victorian age; a poet who in large measure thereafter devoted his talents to homilies, hawkish jingoism, trite



effusions for the omnipresent "annuals," and dire warnings (through the agency of the Idylls) of the influence of adultery on the British family, and indeed upon the Empire itself.¹

However, in recent years, Nicolson's notion of a split in Tennyson's career and sensibility has undergone considerable modification. Jerome Hamilton Buckley tells us that "there is no real break in Tennyson's career; from the beginning he felt some responsibility to the society he lived in, and until the end he remained obedient to the one clear call of his imagination. His development depended not on a sacrifice of the personal vision, but on the constant interaction between public knowledge and private feeling."²

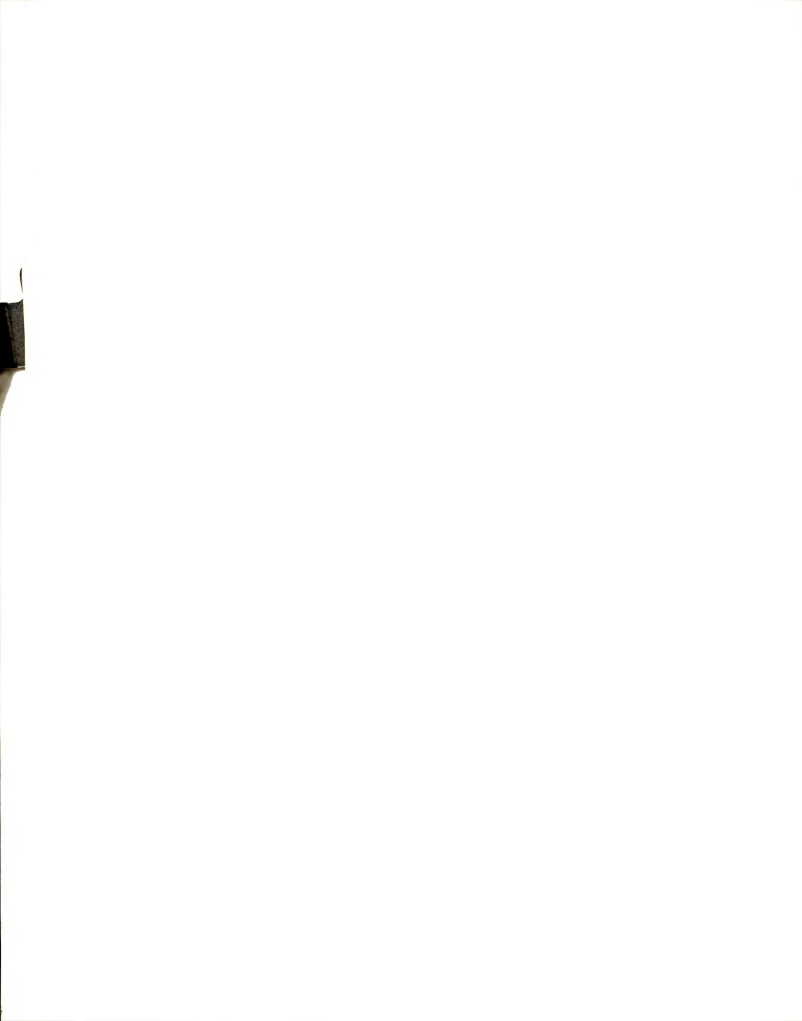
Similarly, Clyde de L. Ryals, in his study of theme and symbol in Tennyson's early work, uses -- instead of words like "split" and "dichotomy" -- the term "interplay" to discuss the interaction between what Ryals calls the "real" and the "Victorian" Tennyson. Ryals seeks:

. . . to show what there is of the inner nature of the man himself in his poetry and how this was blended with the demands of his friends, his reviewers, his reading public, and ultimately, of the Zeitgeist itself. Yet I differ from Nicolson and other commentators in denying that there was a break in Tennyson's career, for from the beginning what is called the "Victorian" in Tennyson was present in his poetry. It is in fact my contention that the interplay between the "real" and the "Victorian" Tennyson is what makes his poetry so interesting to us today.³

Douglas Bush in Mythology and the Romantic Tradition in English Poetry also suggests that from beginning to end Tennyson was sometimes a poet and sometimes a preacher,⁴ but the formula of the frustrated aesthete is a spurious one.⁵ "A complete survey of Tennyson's life from Somersby to Westminster Abbey does not suggest that he was notably warped, that he took or was pushed into the wrong road. Surely, his temperament, his parentage, his early training and environment, made his future course almost certain. There are paradoxes in the mature Tennyson, but there were paradoxes in little Alfred, who was a combination of normal boy, scholar, poet, melancholist and mystic."⁶ Bush continues: "Indeed, in The Palace of Art, for instance, [and I believe in The Lover's Tale] Tennyson poses much the same question that had troubled Shelley and Keats: can the individual live in an intellectual and artistic world of his own, or does he need the nourishment of ordinary human life and sympathy with the common lot?"⁷

Further, according to Edward Elton Smith, one must recognize "those tensions which run through his [Tennyson's] entire work and which, by their very nature, cannot be released or stressed on either pole, but must be accepted as the continued strain of opposites."⁸

Yet, I believe Buckley, Ryals, Bush, and Smith are perhaps indulging in an oversimplification of Tennyson's personality. Innocuous-sounding works like Buckley's

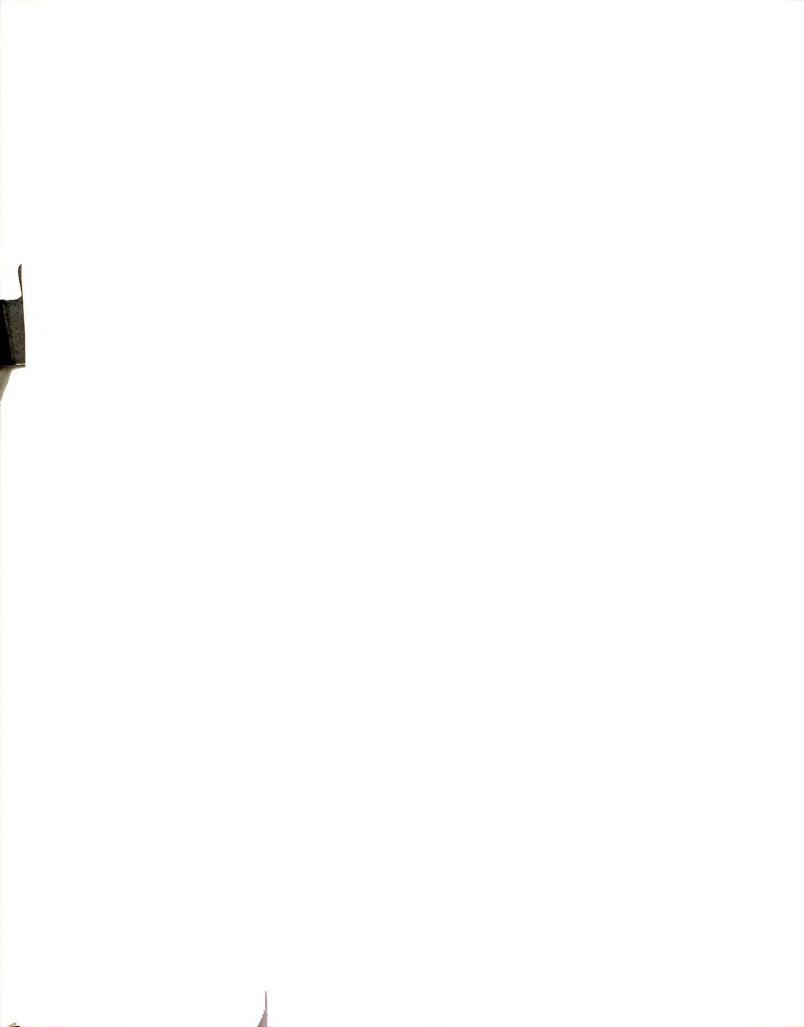


"interaction" and Ryals' "interplay" must not blind us to the true agony which sometimes accompanied the simultaneous development of the "real" and the "Victorian" Tennyson. For, if The Lover's Tale is in any sense autobiographical (and I firmly believe that it is), there was for Tennyson real pain (sometimes couched in the bleeding heart pageantry of Byronism, sometimes in scarifyingly genuine terms) created by the tensions between a near-pathological tendency to withdrawal and its polar opposite, "the objective perception of life [and] participation in its processes."⁹

We are not talking here about healthy imaginative processes or Tennyson's "mysticism" -- which unquestionably requires a kind of withdrawal -- for mysticism was an amalgamating force in much of Tennyson's poetry which helped to coalesce and integrate Tennyson's inner visions and the world outside, and was the underpinning of some of his finest work.¹⁰

What we are talking about here is a narcissistic or solipsistic tendency that seemed inherent in Tennyson's personality, a tendency that could lead to a dangerous and sterile kind of isolation and withdrawal, a spiritually and imaginatively unproductive inwardness, the horrors of which Tennyson described so vividly in "The Palace of Art."

I believe this morbid tendency (and the controlled ambivalent feelings it produced in Tennyson) lies at the root of such poems as "The Lotus Eaters," "The Lady of



Shalott," Maud, "Tithonus," and "Ulysses," among others.

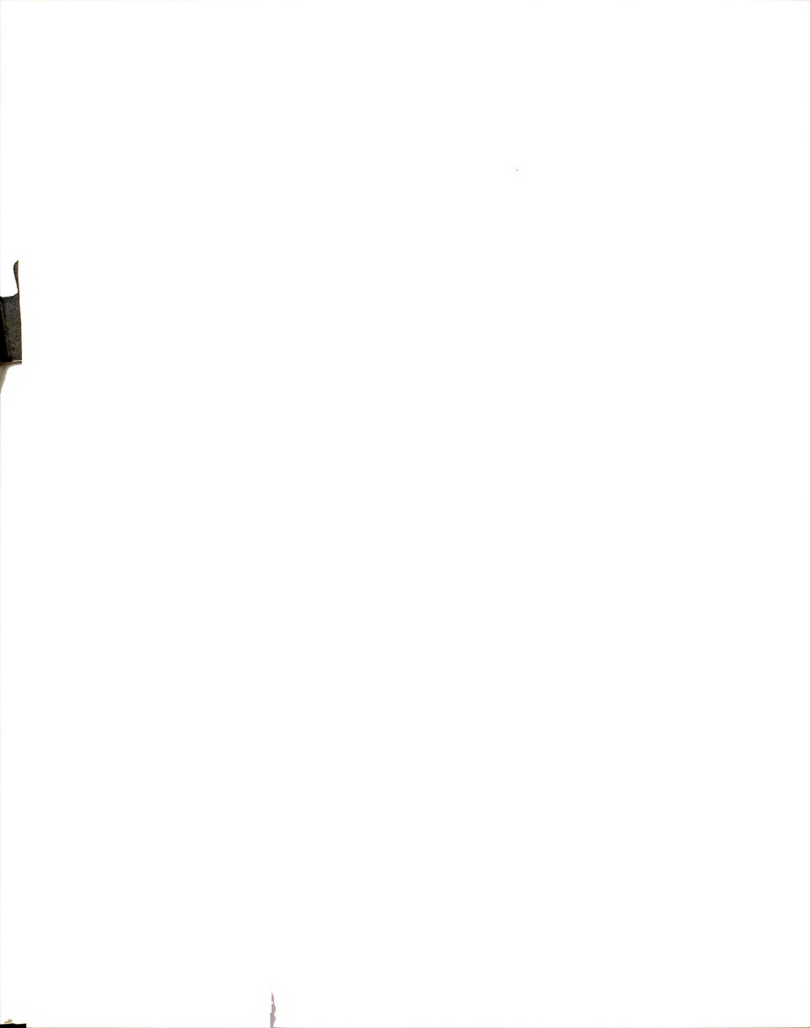
It is a major thrust of this dissertation to show that the agony of even partially vitiating this latter kind of withdrawal is a major theme of The Lover's Tale: that the incestuous-narcissistic relationship of Julian and Camilla symbolizes this unhealthy form of escape, and that, even after the termination of this relationship, Julian remains forever keenly aware of the call of the lost Camilla and the sheltered countryside of the Lover's Bay.

Briefly, my interpretation of the Tale is this: that it has, in Tennyson's words, "a parabolic drift,"¹¹ i.e., that it is an allegory, and an allegory to no small extent of Tennyson's own psychic journeyings.

I hope to demonstrate that the aforementioned solipsistic strain in Tennyson's personality did indeed exist and manifested itself in the undeniable attraction that isolation had for the poet. I believe that Tennyson was acutely aware of the artistic dangers (for a vatic poet) inherent in this kind of morbid self-centeredness, particularly after he had read Shelley at Cambridge.

Tennyson knew he had to root out or modify (insofar as was possible) this streak of narcissism; yet, so powerful was its attraction to him that it is represented in the Tale by the beautiful and radiant Camilla and the Eden-like countryside of the Lover's Bay.

Indeed, as I shall demonstrate, the loss of Camilla is



tantamount to a loss of Eden for the poem's protagonist, Julian, and Tennyson cleverly adopts much of the imagery of Paradise Lost in depicting this loss.

Julian is then "baptised" into a new life -- perhaps a life involving some kind of meaningful social interaction within the Christian community -- although Tennyson is quite vague about this, for reasons I shall try to explain. At any rate, the result is a poem as tantalizingly ambiguous in thematic intent as "The Palace of Art," in which the spiritually-parched Soul, descending from her pinnacle of Godlike isolation to a cottage in the vale, yet begs in the poem's last stanza that her citadel of withdrawal be preserved:

Yet pull not down my palace towers, that are
So lightly, beautifully built;
Perhaps I may return with others there
When I have purged my guilt.¹²

ii

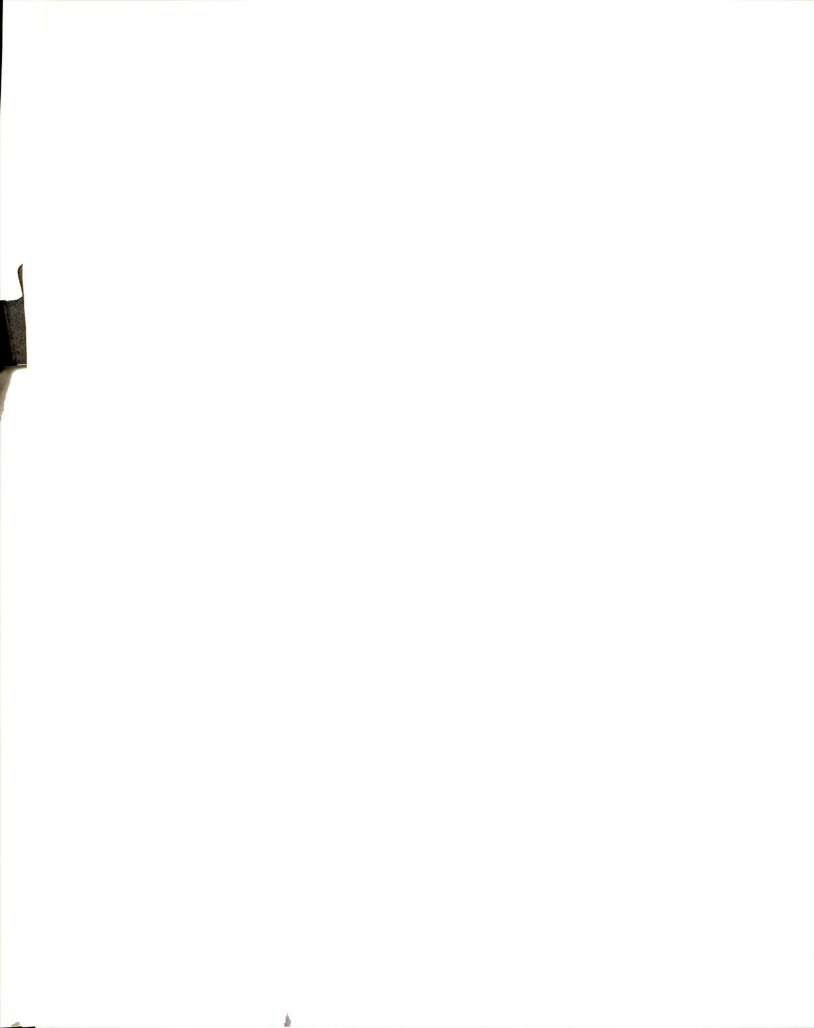
For the curious and somewhat murky history of the composition and publication of The Lover's Tale, the reader is referred to the Appendix of this dissertation. Briefly, the story is this: the poem was begun in Tennyson's late adolescence and three parts were completed during the poet's Cambridge period. Despite the urging of his friends -- particularly Arthur Henry Hallam -- the young poet did not include the work in his 1832 volume of Poems, protesting that it was too full of flaws. But a few copies of Parts I

and II were run off by Tennyson's publisher, Moxon, and distributed among close friends of the poet. The original Part III apparently was discarded. It was not until 1879 that Tennyson published the poem in its final form, although in 1869, curiously, he published the conclusion of the poem which he called "a sequel" -- Part IV, The Golden Supper. The present Parts III and IV were composed presumably in 1868.

One can really only speculate about this delay of around half-century from the poem's inception to its publication in final form. Tennyson was perhaps sincere in his protestations that the poem was fragmentary and full of faults, and that it was only published in full in 1879 because of piracies. Or, despite Sir Charles Tennyson's assertion that "none of his early poems, not even 'The Lover's Tale' (written in his nineteenth year) seems to show the sharp edge of personal experience,"¹³ the poem may have been the product of a real love affair, an affair that cut so deeply that the sometimes reticent poet may have not wanted to display his youthful feelings to the world.

iii

Did Camilla have a real-life prototype -- or is she pure symbol? As we have seen above, all through Tennyson's long life there was interplay between the polarities of withdrawal and the ambition, in Thomas Carlyle's words, to



become "the Vates, whether Prophet or Poet [who] has penetrated into it ['the divine mystery' and] is a man sent hither to make it more impressively known to us. That is always his message; he is to reveal that to us, -- that sacred mystery which he more than others lives ever present with."¹⁴ Given this ambivalence within the poet's personality, Camilla might possibly have been made up out of whole cloth, metaphorically to represent an innate urge to crawl into a shell or aesthetic self-absorption.

Or, as Clarice Short points out, Camilla may have reflected Tennyson's "ideal of feminine beauty [stemming from] his close association in childhood with dark-haired, dark-eyed women. His mother and sisters were all dark-complexioned. . . . [and] Rosa Baring was both dark and beautiful, and as conjectural as Tennyson's relations with her must forever remain, at least he probably met her two years before he entered Cambridge and her image may well have haunted him."¹⁵

Or, despite Tennyson's protestations that he wrote the Tale "before I had seen a Shelley although it is called Shelleyan," (Memoir II, 285) Camilla bears a striking resemblance to some of Shelley's dark-eyed, dark-tressed heroines, who may have been modelled after some of the young ladies in the Gothic romances he (Shelley) had read. There is surely a note of Shelley's Platonism in a fragment of The Lover's Tale which Clarice Short points out "was never incorporated in a printed version yet is identifiable by



tone and substance":

Fair Face! fair form and tenant of a brain
 Peopled with griefs whose blackness cannot mar
 Your lustre, when fatigued with things less fair
 These eyes rolled inward, gazing as they gazed
 Upon the archetype in happier hours.
 Beautiful permanence! Indwelling light
 Unvanishing! Which never transient thought
 Supplants or shades, for thou dost glow through all
 Intense Idea; though I close the doors
 Of mental vision on thee, thou dost burn
 As sunlight thro' them.¹⁶

Again we are left to speculate.

iv

The Lover's Tale has received comparatively little critical attention. Yet the poem, however awkward, is fascinating -- and one of the reasons for its fascination, aside from the biographical inferences one may draw, is that it relates the Romanticism of the late 1820's to Victorianism and, finally, to early Modernism, or Paterian relativism. One must remember that Tennyson began the poem when he was virtually a boy, but did not publish it in final form until 1879, when the heyday of the Victorian experience was long past, when indeed Tennyson must have felt that he was, like Arnold, caught between two worlds, "one dead, the other powerless to be born." Thus the poem represents in a sense a kind of paradigm of the nineteenth century experience, and for this reason alone it seems to me worthy of detailed investigation.

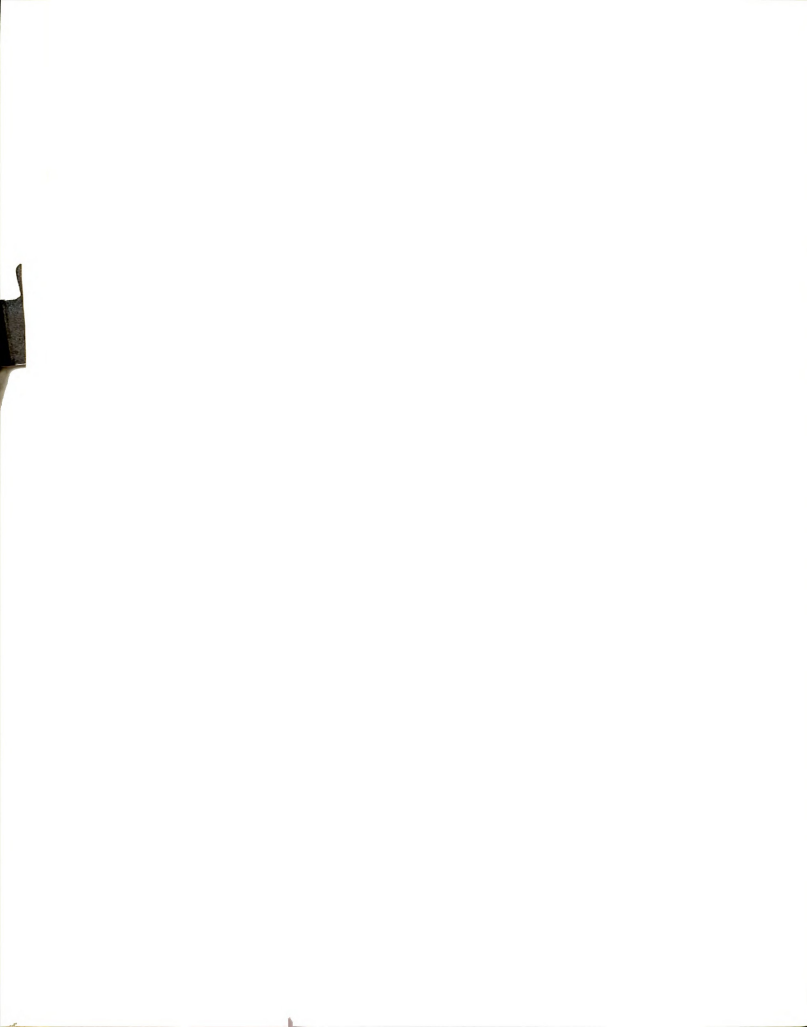
Again, despite its unevenness, the poem shows in many areas a sure control of poetic idiom. Tennyson's use of

Miltonic theme and imagery in relating the myth of the fall to Julian's story is masterful; as is the poet's use of baptismal symbolism in describing Julian's redemption from a solipsistic narcissism.

Noted above are, I believe, only a very few of the reasons why The Lover's Tale deserves full-dress critical treatment. In the hope of determining just what rank this poem should hold in the body of Tennyson's work (and I firmly believe that such rank should be a higher one than is now accorded it) let us take a long, hard look at the implications inherent in this strange work.

The rather Gothic narrative line of The Lover's Tale is simple enough. Julian -- the protagonist and "himself a poet" -- and Camilla, his foster-sister, are brought up together by Julian's mother in the lonely countryside around the Lover's Bay, a paradisiacal retreat seemingly safe from all intruders. In his late adolescence it begins to dawn on Julian that he is in love with his foster-sister. He is seemingly about to confess this love to Camilla, when she tells him she loves Lionel, apparently another denizen of Lover's Bay country, but for whose appearance the reader is scarcely prepared. Julian is crushed; but a mysterious voice warns him not to leave his native haunts. Camilla and Lionel are married, and at some later point the bridegroom is called away for a time.

During Lionel's absence, Camilla "dies" -- or, rather,



falls into a narcoleptic trance and is mistaken for dead. She is laid to rest in the family crypt. Julian descends into the crypt to give her one last kiss and discovers that her heart is still beating. Julian retrieves her from the crypt and carries her to his mother's home where Camilla is duly revived. Sometime later Camilla gives birth to Lionel's heir -- although where Lionel is during this period we are given no clue.

At length Lionel returns and Julian prepares a sumptuous banquet to which Lionel and a few scattered neighbors are invited. At the climax of the solemn feast, Julian brings Camilla and her babe from behind a curtain and returns them to a startled Lionel. Julian and a Narrator (who has taken over telling the tale in Part IV) then ride away to the Narrator's country, and the story ends. (Tennyson tells us that the story comes from Boccaccio, but actually only Part IV bears much resemblance to the story in The Decameron, 10th Day, 4th Tale in which a "resurrection" scene also occurs.)

One might infer, from Tennyson's well-known view of the poet as a prophet charged with great public responsibilities, that Julian -- himself a poet -- rides away from the isolation of the Lover's Bay to take up the social burden. There are hints that this is, indeed, Julian's errand: Julian's counterpart in the Boccaccio source becomes (after his disappointment in love) not a recluse but a public official, one whose concerns are very much in the world. Further, we shall see

that from the description of the solemn feast in Part IV of the Tale, the inference may be drawn that Julian is a Christ-figure come to spread the "good news" of Christian belief to the world.

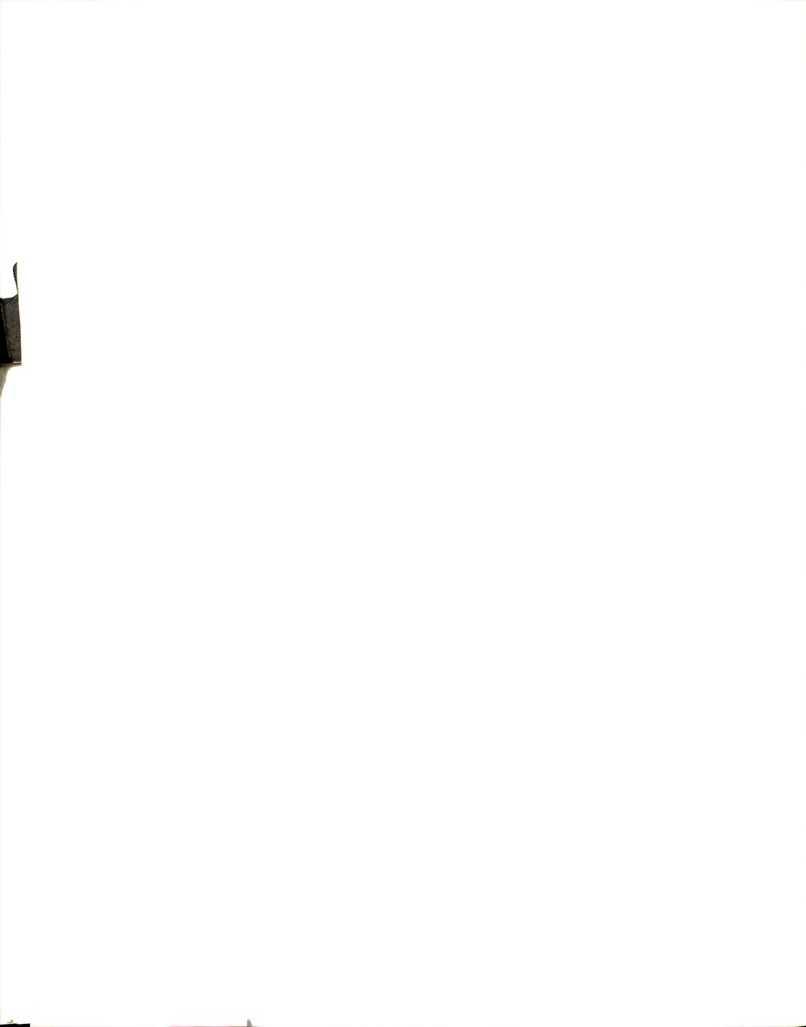
But there are other legitimate inferences, too. Tennyson only follows the Boccaccio story very generally, and there is certainly a question as to how many parallels may legitimately be drawn between Julian and Boccaccio's Gentile de Carisendi. One can speculate, too, that Julian's "conversion" from a sterile inwardness is in fact ironic; that the next step after the "Last Supper" of Section IV is a lonely, and final Golgotha.

The point is, Tennyson does not tell us Julian's ultimate fate. The Tale's ending is ambiguous; and far from being a flaw in the poem, this ambiguity provides one of the Tale's central interests. Hence, a number of pages in the latter part of this dissertation are devoted to speculation -- based on other of Tennyson's poems contemporaneous in composition with the conclusion of The Lover's Tale, and on the late nineteenth-century Zeitgeist -- as to why the laureate did not complete Julian's story.

But whatever inferences one may draw from the ambiguity inherent in Julian's departure at the conclusion of The Lover's Tale, the major aim of my dissertation is, in outline, essentially this: to show that Tennyson early was aware of an ambivalence within himself; that he was plagued (especially

in his youth) by a self-division that involved, on the one hand, a tendency toward solipsistic withdrawal, and, on the other, an urge to become, like his own Merlin of the Idylls, a seer, an artificer of "use" to society.

In Chapter I, some manifestations of this self-division (endemic in a number of pre-Romantic, Romantic, and Victorian writers) are discussed; Manfred, the chief character of Walpole's Castle of Otranto (who vacillates unpredictably from villainy to remorse) is seen as a forerunner of Byronic heroes such as Lara and Manfred, themselves curious amalgams of good and evil. Shelley's Alastor is discussed in considerable detail as a kind of cautionary tale, for another type of self-division is embodied in the Poet of Shelley's work (and in the "I" of Epipsychidion, too): in Alastor, the vain pursuit of the Poet for his epipsyche or "antitype" -- no more than a narcissistic self-projection -- is the result of the sort of inner fragmentation that Tennyson knew he must eliminate, or at least modify, in his own personality if he was to escape the "untimely grave" of Shelley's Poet. I would like to firmly stress here that I definitely do not want to suggest in this discussion that Alastor and The Lover's Tale are parallel poems; indeed, in a very crucial sense the reverse is true. For while the "veiled maid" of Alastor leads the Poet to a poignant self-destruction, Julian, however unwillingly, divests himself -- or is divested of -- his nemesis. What I suggest in this chapter is that Tennyson saw mirrored



in the Alastor Poet (and in the "I" of Epipsychidion) a facet of his own personality that he knew he must expunge or mitigate if he was to achieve the high poetic goal he had set for himself.

Chapter II is devoted to the influence of Milton on the young Tennyson, for the strong echoes of Paradise Lost that appear in The Lover's Tale, especially the mythical pattern of the fortunate fall, are highly useful in elucidating Tennyson's poem. Indeed, Tennyson's adaptation of Miltonic theme and symbol provides the careful reader of the Tale with an interpretive inference truly vital to an understanding of The Lover's Tale. For the expulsion of Julian from his "paradise" of solipsism is the basis for the ultimate integration of his character and his final act of self-sacrifice.

Chapter III discusses the cleansing power of water as an agent of redemption and healing. Tennyson's poetry -- like so much Victorian writing -- is rife with baptismal suggestion; and in The Lover's Tale Julian must undergo the "death-in-life" of baptism in order to be washed clean of the "sin" of narcissistic self-absorption (symbolized by the Julian-Camilla relationship and its incestuous overtones). The process is an agonizing one: in one harrowing, hallucinatory sequence, Julian seems almost to seek surcease from his agony by drowning; but the instinct for survival overwhelms the death wish and he casts the "husk" of Camilla from him, and somehow emerges from the sea which has almost claimed him. After Julian's



cleansing by water, it seems logical within this reprise to discuss the next step in his psychic development, his "free gift" of Camilla and her babe to her husband, Lionel. Julian turns Camilla over to her husband at a solemn feast held in Julian's ancestral hall, and the imagery here is clearly that of the Last Supper, or the Holy Communion of the Anglican Church. Julian is by now a Christ figure; he has been "baptised," he has resurrected Camilla from the crypt where she has lain in a cataleptic trance; and in turning over to Lionel his first cousin and foster-sister he is at least figuratively giving of his blood. If not a Christ figure, Julian now certainly qualifies at least as a member of the Christian community, with all that such membership implies.

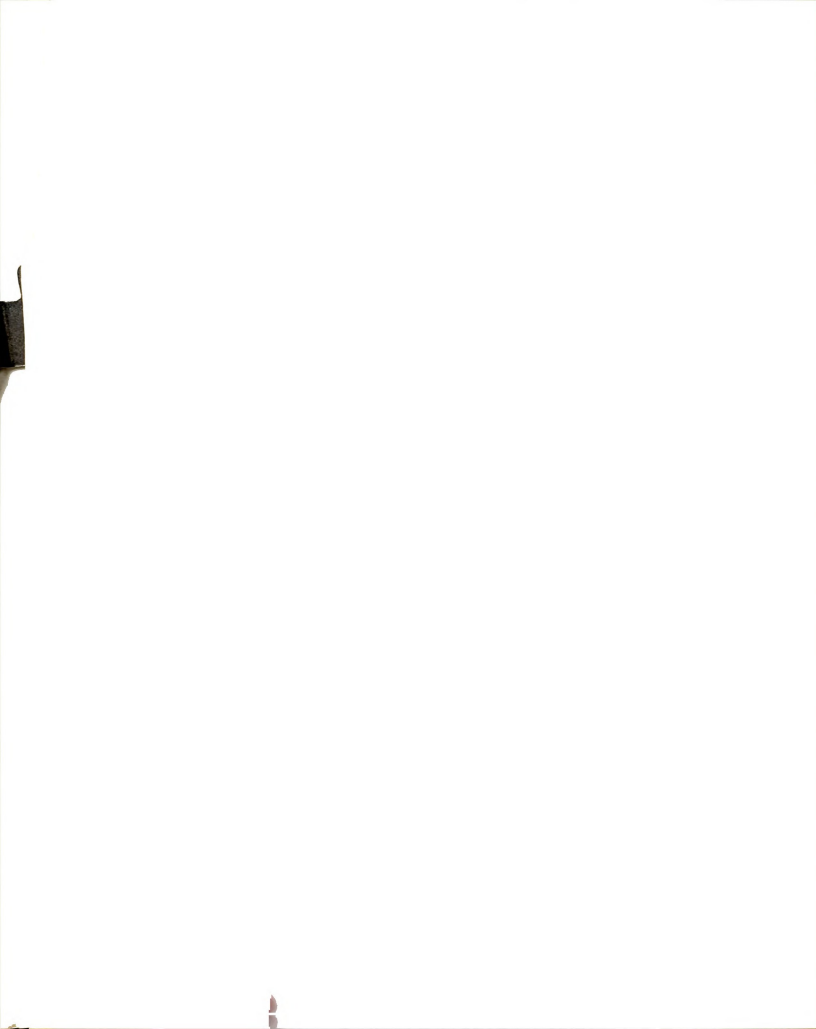
Chapter IV is devoted to speculation concerning Julian's final ride into oblivion (at least so far as the reader is concerned). What is his ultimate fate? Does he become a useful citizen like his counterpart in the Boccaccio source? If Julian is indeed analogous to Christ, is his role -- as hero-poet -- to spread the good news of Christ's arrival to redeem mankind? Or is he to be despised and rejected, to be nailed to a cross by a corrupt society that has rejected the Arthurian (and Christian) ideal? A consideration of some of the darker Idylls written about the time of The Golden Supper is offered as a possible clue to the ambiguity of Julian's exit.

Chapter V provides further evidence that Tennyson had,

certainly by the time of the completion of The Lover's Tale achieved considerable, if not full, integration of personality. Although Tennyson tones down considerably Boccaccio's crypt scene insofar as its sexual aspects are concerned, he seems no longer torn by the attractions and repulsions regarding sex that tormented him in his boyhood. In other words, another aspect of the dilemma of the divided self had been resolved.

The final chapter (VI) explores the dream-trance device (so frequently used in Tennyson's poetry) and its employment in the Tale. I suggest here that Tennyson with all his interest in psychology) may have been more familiar with pre-Freudian psychological theories than his grandson gives him credit for; and that he was certainly not "naive" (Sir Charles Tennyson's word) when it came to the workings of the human psyche. (Witness his keen understanding of the narcissistic personality.) Tennyson himself said of the Bedlam episodes in Maud that 'About the mad-scene one of the best known doctors for the insane wrote that it was "the most faithful representation of madness since Shakespeare."' (Memoir I, 398) I further suggest that E. D. H. Johnson is wrong when he suggests that Tennyson uses dreams as a kind of cryptographic subterfuge to hide his inmost thoughts from an unsympathetic public. But the main concern of Chapter VI is Tennyson's knowledge (however attained) and skillful use of dream and trance as a means of thematic elucidation.

In the "Conclusion" to my discussion of this vexing, uneven poem, I have pointed up the genuine artistry embodied in many of its aspects; the remarkable self-knowledge that the author reveals in handling the poem's major themes; and the development of the poet's thought and feeling in the half-century over which the poem was composed. But, above all, I have tried to show that The Lover's Tale (for all its obvious flaws) is far more than a young man's fulminations or an old man's maunderings, but that it is a genuine work of art deserving a firmer place in the Tennyson canon.



FOOTNOTES

INTRODUCTION

¹ This is, generally speaking, the picture of Tennyson that Nicolson gives us in his Tennyson: Aspects of His Life, Character, and Poetry (London: Constable, 1923).

² Tennyson: The Growth of A Poet (1960; rpt. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), p. 255.

³ Theme and Symbol in Tennyson's Poems to 1850 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1964), p. 8.

⁴ Mythology and the Romantic Tradition in English Literature (1937; rpt. New York: W. W. Norton, 1969), p. 199.

⁵ Ibid., p. 198.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., p. 201.

⁸ The Two Voices: A Tennyson Study (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964), p. 13.

⁹ James L. Hill, "Tennyson's 'The Lady of Shalott': The Ambiguity of Commitment," The Centennial Review, Vol. XII, No. 4, (Fall, 1968), p. 419.

¹⁰ Tennyson apparently was quite firm in his belief that only the integrated, healthy personality could, for example, achieve mystic communication with the dead. In In Memoriam (XCIV), the poet says:

How pure at heart and sound in head,
With What divine affections old
Should be the man whose thought would hold,
An hour's communion with the dead.

In vain shalt thou, or any, call
The spirits from their golden day,
Except, like them, thou too canst say,
My spirit is at peace with all.

(see footnote 12)

¹¹ Hallam, Lord Tennyson, Alfred, Lord Tennyson, A Memoir, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1897), II, p. 127. Hereinafter referred to as Memoir, followed by volume and page citations.

¹² Alfred, Lord Tennyson, The Poems of Tennyson, ed. Christopher Ricks (London: Longmans, Green, 1969). This text will be used for all citations of Tennyson's verse which will be identified wherever possible within the body of the paper by the poem's title, section and line, but not by page. Citations from Ricks' scholarly apparatus will be cited as "Ricks": e.g., Ricks, pp. 300-301.

¹³ Charles Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson (1949; rpt. New York: Archon Books, 1968) p. 101.

¹⁴ On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1907), p. 111.

¹⁵ PMLA, LXXXII (1967), 82-83. (In the Tale Julian refers to his childhood with Camilla as "that porch/ So unproportioned to the dwelling place," (I, 180-181) and it may be of interest to note that Harrington Hall, where the intriguing Rosa lived had a "fine old brick front with projecting porch . . . On either side of the porch which runs up the whole height of the house, are twelve windows, under deep, projecting corbelled eaves." The quotation, which lays such stress on Harrington's porch, comes from Willingham Franklin Rawsley's Highways and Byways in Lincolnshire [London: Macmillan, 1914], p. 340.)

¹⁶ Ibid., 79.



CHAPTER I

"The Divided Self": Shelley and The Lover's Tale

i

In his provocative book, The Divided Self, Masao Miyoshi tells us that the "confusion, the perplexity, the deep unease of the English nineteenth century are impressed on all who study the period" and he concerns himself with the ways "in which Victorian men of letters experienced the self division endemic to their times and gave expression to it in their writing."¹

Miyoshi says that "Victorian writers started with the knowledge of the Romantic failure in self-discovery." He continues: "To their own great fear of Romantic indeterminacy, they [the Victorians] responded with what is often called the 'Victorian conversion,' which, defining a moral view of art as life, tries to put the divided self together and make it work. Imagination must be disciplined by the rational, play by the reality principle."²

Taking Tennyson as an example of the High Victorian artistic sensibility, I shall attempt to show -- through The Lover's Tale -- that Tennyson was acutely aware of the problem of a self divided against itself; that he did strike a balance between "imagination" and the "rational," "play" and the "reality principle;" that he was able to synthesize

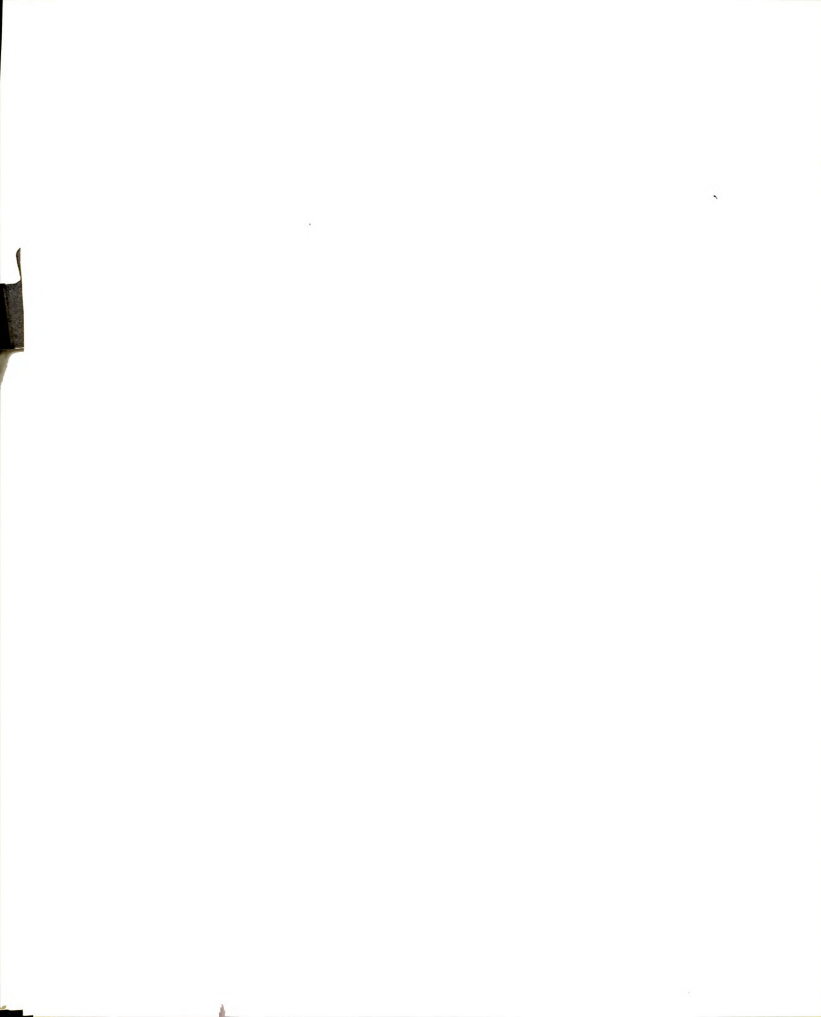
the 'one clear call' of Camilla and the claims of the "real" world. But the fact that Tennyson was able to resolve the schism of self-division did not mean that he was not often a prey to the "confusion, the perplexity, the deep unease" of an age that went spinning down the grooves of change at [for the Victorians] an awesome clip. Poems such as "Supposed Confessions of a Second-Rate Sensitive Mind" and "The Two Voices" are examples of this.

It is in Pope's An Essay on Man, Miyoshi tells us, that certain germs of the development of the divided self in the Pre-Romantic, Romantic and Victorian periods are apparent:

With too much knowledge of the Sceptic side,
With too much weakness for the Stoic's pride,
He hangs between; in doubt to act or rest;
In doubt to deem himself a God or Beast.
(Ep. II, 5-8)

For before long, says Miyoshi, this same "God" and "Beast" are to be "joint tenants of the dark cave of the Gothic Villain hero,"³ who eventually are to evolve, through many convolutions, into a personification of one High Victorian dilemma: withdrawn aestheticism or participation in life and its multitudinousness.

"The poets and the novelists of the succeeding generations were to make new use of this extraordinary form [early Gothicism and its exploration of the irrational in man] in their attempt to set down their sense of the widening rift in the self -- between imagination and reason, feeling and thought, belief and agnosticism, and increasingly between private



experience and public responsibility."⁴

Miyoshi contends that English Gothicism stands at the beginning of a tradition in English literature "marked unmistakably by its practitioners' overriding concern with the problems of the self in the modern world. Early Gothic is a necessary part of this broader tradition by virtue of its exploration of the irrational in man and consequent liberation of the novelist's [and poet's] imagination. More specifically, it was the first modern prose form disposed to fairly intensive concern with the various phenomena of the divided self."⁵

Miyoshi sums up Walpole's Manfred in The Castle of Otranto: "Manfred is alternately all goodness and reason and passionate to the point of ferocity. At one mement he is admiring Friar Jerome's 'saint-like virtue' and wishing to emulate it, and at the next trembling with a 'rage' strangely compounded with 'shame!'"⁶

Of the Gothic villain, Miyoshi has this to say: he is "a villain whose remorse for his evildoing is often as thoroughgoing as his villainy. It is this violent oscillation of evil deed and penitent mood that makes the Gothic villain a modern archetype for alienated man divided against himself."⁷

Incest, though it is barely hinted at in Otranto, takes on considerable importance in later works, and is, as we shall see, a powerful motif in The Lover's Tale. Miyoshi has this to say:

The incest motif has a lineage as long as the Western literary tradition, but its appearance at this time, after a noticeable hiatus in the neoclassic period, and its frequent use since, takes on special significance. Violation of a taboo of this sort, even in fiction, tells as much about the temper of the time as about the author's own psychology. As perhaps the extreme expression of social defiance, incest was a serviceable symbol for the Romantics, who took seriously their obligations as rebels and social critics. What society finds distasteful or dangerous is often for that reason alone attractive to those who see that same society as corrupt and contemptible. Moreover, the sheer shock effect of violating in print such a strong taboo prepared the way for the attack on a whole range of other customs and complacencies. Incest was thus probably the most versatile weapon in the Romantics antisocial arsenal. It was also, so they were discovering, a metaphor of the most astonishing correspondence to their own state of dual and undecided identity. The incestuous relation. . . finally dissolves the identifying masks distinguishing one individual from another. Given the time-honored sense of the family as an extension of self, a larger self in a sense, the incestuous act becomes the moment for the self meeting with itself.⁸ (Emphasis mine)

Indeed, so common was the incest motif to become in Romantic literature, that Mario Praz calls Byron's alleged incest with his half-sister Augusta "a plagiarism."⁹

It must certainly be obvious by now that the Gothic villain, who oscillates violently between villainy and remorse, is a direct antecedent of the Byronic hero, that strange mixture of good and evil, that creature of flawed grandeur,

an alien, mysterious, and gloomy spirit, in all his passions and powers immensely greater than the common run of mankind, whom he regards with contempt as a lesser being than himself. He harbors an inner demon, a torturing memory of an enormous though nameless guilt, which drives him restlessly toward an inevitable doom. He lives

according to a simple and rigid code of his own:
 to the one he truly, though fatally, loves, he is
 faithful to death, and he will not betray a trust.
 . . . and he exerts on men and women alike an
 attraction which is the more irresistible because
 it involves terror at his obliviousness to ordinary
 human concerns and values."¹⁰

There is the hero of Lara:¹¹

In him inexplicably mixed appeared
 Much to be loved and hated, sought and feared;
 Opinion varying o'er his hidden lot,
 In praise or railing ne'er his name forgot:
 His silence formed a theme for others' prate --
 They guessed, they gazed -- they fain would know his fate.
 What had he been? What was he, thus unknown,
 Who walked their world, his lineage only known?
 A hater of his kind? (XVII, 288-296)

Yet this particular Byronic hero was endowed "With more capacity
 for love than earth/ Bestows on most of mortal mold and birth,"
 (XVII, 321-322)

It is perhaps in Byron's verse play, Manfred, that we find
 the delineation of the Byronic hero par excellence, the homme
fatal. Byron's Manfred, a figure of high but mysterious
 lineage, lives in a Gothic castle in the Alps, and describes
 himself as one of those who are:

Half-dust, half-deity, alike unfit
 To sink or soar, with our essence make
 A conflict of its elements, and breathe
 The breath of degradation and of pride,
 (I, ii, 40-43)

He has committed "deeds of good and ill, extreme in both," and
 among the evil deeds is incest, made virtually explicit in the
 following lines: "Thou lovedst me/ Too much, as I loved thee:
 we were not made/ To torture thus each other, though it were/
 The deadliest sin to love as we have loved." (II, iv, 120-125)

I consider the Byronic hero for I believe he is the exemplum of what Miyoshi has to say about the self-alienation of the Romantics. And it is I believe appropriate, if a bit abrupt at this point, to say something about Byron's influence on Tennyson, since a major thrust of this dissertation concerns the poetic tensions that inform Tennyson's work from beginning to end, and how he dealt with them. Byron's influence upon Tennyson apparently was quite short-lived. Charles Tennyson relates the old story of the fourteen-year-old Tennyson, who upon hearing of Byron's death (in April, 1824) "ran to his beloved Holywell wood, threw himself on the ground and carved upon the sandstone the words, 'BYRON IS DEAD.' But the Byronic phase did not long outlive the master's death."¹² There is, of course, the incest motif in the Tale; there is the strident, self-pitying note in some of Julian's complaints; but conspicuously lacking in Julian's character is the very essence of the Byronic hero, that derivation from the Gothic villain-hero, the mixture of good and evil. But if we are to say that the Tennysonian self was at the outset a divided self (however well he resolved this inner breach when he came to write his greatest poetry); if we are to infer that Camilla is a kind of Shelleyan epipsyche or antitype, in other words, a symbolic extension of one facet of Tennyson's personality; then we must, I think, acknowledge the kinship between, say, the Byronic hero and Julian. For each, in very different ways, is a "split" personality. Julian, we might say is a

collateral, rather than a direct descendant of the Byronic hero -- but a descendant nonetheless.

It is Shelley and his preoccupation with narcissistic self-division -- as revealed in such poems as Alastor and Epipsychidion -- whose thematic material echoes most loudly in the Tale. And despite Tennyson's disclaimer in 1883 -- "As for 'The Lover's Tale,' that was written before I had ever seen a Shelley, although it is called Shelleyan" (Memoir, II, 285) -- resemblances seem to me unmistakable. And although this dissertation, as I have stressed, is by no means an influence study, it seems unlikely that a Cantabridgian of the late 1820's could have failed to have fallen under Shelley's spell.

Jerome Hamilton Buckley writes: "When Tennyson published 'The Lover's Tale' in 1879, he described the first three parts as the product of his 'nineteenth year,' i.e., of late 1827 or early 1828 [Memoir, I, p. 48]. But I assume that composition carried over well into the Cambridge period. Tennyson seems to have kept reworking the poem up until 1832 [see Memoir, I, 83-84, 88]."¹³

One must tend to believe Buckley, for the poem appears shot through with Shelley's influence, and Cambridge then was a hotbed of Shelley enthusiasts. Charles Tennyson writes that one day in the mid-1820's, "Frederick [Alfred's older brother] came back to Lincolnshire from a visit and as he and Alfred were driving home from the coach whispered 'I've

got a poet who is much finer than Byron,' and repeated one line from 'The Revolt of Islam':

Waterfalls leap among wild islands green,
which Alfred thought delicious. But it seems he never saw a copy of any poem by Shelley until he went up to Cambridge two or three years later, and the same is probably true about Wordsworth and Keats."¹⁴

Alfred and his brother Charles matriculated at Trinity College, Cambridge, on February 20, 1828 (Memoir, I, 3), when "From a little Lincolnshire village arrived two brothers, Charles and Alfred Tennyson. Both of them were tall and dark, with waving hair, great domed foreheads. Charles was twenty and Alfred nineteen."¹⁵ That same year to Cambridge came other future notables: Arthur Hallam, only seventeen, son of the famous historian; John Kemble, brother of Fanny; Monckton Milnes, afterward Lord Houghton; Richard Trench, the future Archbishop of Dublin; Henry Alford, who was to become Dean of Canterbury; and Charles Merivale, the historian, who was to become Dean of Ely. "They joined the Cambridge Conversazione Society, which had been started in 1824, and very soon gained for themselves the title of 'the Cambridge Apostles.' The society met on Saturday evenings, and at each meeting a member read an essay on a given subject. . . . Many subjects were discussed at these meetings -- the poetry of Landor, Southey, Keats, Coleridge, and Wordsworth, the philosophy of Niebuhr, Bentham, and John Stuart Mill, with

many others of a less literary nature."¹⁶

Cruse tells us that "The Apostles . . . were enthusiastic in their admiration of Shelley and discussed his poems eagerly at their meetings. They talked indignantly of the stupidity and blindness that Oxford had shown in turning away the marvelous youth; and they doubted whether even now, when his genius had so clearly been proved, she appreciated him as he deserved."¹⁷

Given the enthusiasm of Cambridge for Shelley, we may, I believe, safely assume that Tennyson had read at least two of that poet's remarkable works, Alastor or The Spirit of Solitude, and Epipsychidion. I shall quote rather extensively from the brief essay "On Love" which Shelley wrote sometime between 1815 and 1817, for I believe the narcissistic and metaphorically deadly kind of love about which Shelley writes informs both Alastor and Epipsychidion, particularly the former, and is one of the important links between Shelley and Tennyson:

Thou demandest what is love? It is that powerful attraction toward all that we conceive, or fear, or hope beyond ourselves, when we find within our own thoughts the chasm of an insufficient void, and seek to awaken in all things that are, a community with what we experience within ourselves. If we reason, we would be understood; if we imagine, we would that the airy children of our brain were born anew within another's; if we feel, we would that another's nerves should vibrate to our own, that lips of motionless ice should not reply to lips quivering and burning with the heart's best blood. This is love. This is the bond and the sanction which connects not only man with man, but with everything which exists. We are born into the

world, and there is something within us which, from the instant that we live, more and more thirsts after its likeness. It is probably in correspondence with this law that the infant drains milk from the bosom of its mother; this propensity develops itself with the development of our nature. We dimly see within our intellectual nature a miniature as it were of our entire self, yet deprived of all that we condemn or despise, the ideal prototype of everything excellent that we are capable of conceiving as belonging to the nature of man. Not only the portrait of our external being, but an assemblage of the minutest particles of which our nature is composed; a mirror whose surface reflects only the forms of purity and brightness; a soul within our soul that describes a circle around its proper paradise, which pain, and sorrow, and evil dare not overleap. To this we eagerly refer all sensations, thirsting that they should resemble or correspond with it. The discovery of its anti-type; the meeting with an understanding capable of clearly estimating our own; an imagination which should enter into and seize upon the subtle and delicate peculiarities which we have delighted to cherish and unfold in secret; with a frame whose nerves, like the chords of two exquisite lyres strung to the accompaniment of one delightful voice, vibrate with the vibrations of our own; and of a combination of all these in such proportion as the type within demands, this is the invisible and unattainable point to which love tends.¹⁸

If incest is "the moment for the self meeting with the self,"¹⁹ then surely what Shelley is describing above is a kind of quintessential incest, a meeting of the self with the self which is best bodied forth in the legend of Narcissus, which is, I believe, an underlying framework of Alastor.

In the "Preface" to that poem,²⁰ which Shelley says may be considered as "allegorical of one of the most interesting situations of the human kind," a youth of "uncorrupted feelings and adventurous genius [is] led forth by an imagination inflamed and purified through familiarity with all that is, excellent

and majestic, to the contemplation of the universe":

He drinks deep of the fountains of knowledge, and is still insatiate. The magnificence and beauty of the external world sinks profoundly into the frame of his conceptions, and affords to their modifications a variety not to be exhausted. So long as it is possible for his desires to point toward objects thus infinite and unmeasured, he is joyous and tranquil, and self-possessed. But the period arrives when these objects cease to suffice. His mind is at length suddenly awakened and thirsts for intercourse with an intelligence similar to himself. He images to himself the Being whom he loves. Conversant with speculations of the sublimest and most perfect natures, the vision in which he embodies his own imaginations unites all of wonderful or wise, or beautiful, which the poet, philosopher or the lover could depicture. The intellectual faculties, the imagination, the functions of sense, have their respective requisitions on corresponding powers in other human beings. The Poet is represented as uniting these requisitions and attaching them to a single image. He seeks in vain for a prototype of his conception. Blasted by his disappointment, he descends to an untimely grave.²¹

In the essay "On Love," Shelley has pointed out that such a love as the Poet of Alastor envisions is "unattainable;" and in the "Preface" to Alastor he says that it can lead only to an "untimely grave." But, Shelley continues, while the Poet's "self-centered seclusion" brought about his speedy ruin, he is not an unsympathetic character. Those "Meaner spirits," those who "deluded by no generous error, instigated by no sacred thirst of doubtful knowledge, duped by no illustrious superstition, loving nothing on this earth and cherishing no hopes beyond, yet keep aloof from sympathies with their kind, rejoicing neither in human joy or mourning with human grief; these, and such as they, have their apportioned curse." For "Those who love not their

fellow-beings live unfruitful lives, and prepare for their old age a miserable grave."²²

The epigraph to the poem, from St. Augustine, reads "Nondum amabam, et amare amabam, quaerebam quid amarem, amans amare." In his exhaustive treatment of Shelley's works, Earl R. Wasserman translates the latter part of this epigraph as follows: "I sought something that I might love, loving to love." Wasserman then adds: "The act [of loving] is reflexive and has no completing object but itself, as though 'to love' were an intransitive verb."²³ "Consequently," Wasserman says, "the solitary mind is driven to project itself as its narcissistic object, and ideal Doppelgänger, a 'ghastly presence' ever hovering 'Beside thee like thy shadow.'"²⁴

We can now move to a synopsis of Alastor itself, in order to see what Tennyson was trying to do in The Lover's Tale: i.e., avoid the fatal Alastor pattern. As I have stated earlier, Tennyson was to conclude that the solipsistic fate of the Poet of Alastor (however morbidly attractive) was one that he must shun; he (Tennyson) must compose a poem in which the hero is not "Blasted by disappointment [in his futile quest and] descends into an untimely grave." The poem (Alastor) is related by a Narrator, whose words at the beginning of the poem show a strong Wordsworthian influence. The Narrator speaks of the "natural piety" (l. 3) of Nature, and asks her, "Mother of this unfathomable world!" (l. 18)

to inspire his solemn song. He regards himself as a kind
of Aeolian harp,

. . . a long forgotten lyre
Suspended in the solitary dome
Of some mysterious and deserted fame,
[Who waits] thy breath, Great Parent,
(ll. 42-45)

The Narrator speaks of a Poet whose "untimely tomb/
No human hands with pious reverence reared,/ But the charmed
eddies of autumnal winds/ Built o'er his mouldering bones
a pyramid/ Of mouldering leaves in the waste wilderness: --"
(ll. 50-54). This "lovely youth" (l. 55) had from infancy
been nurtured "By solemn vision, and bright silver dream,"
(l. 68), and

. . . Every sight
And sound from the vast earth and ambient air,
Sent to his heart its choicest impulses.
The fountains of divine philosophy
Fled not his thirsting lips, and all of great,
And good, or lovely, which the sacred past
In truth or fable consecrates, he felt
And knew.

(ll. 69-75)

But, "When early youth had passed, he left/ His cold
fireside and alienated home/ To find strange truths in
undiscovered lands." (ll. 75-77)

He explores "Many a wide waste and tangled wilderness,"
(l. 78) following "Nature's most secret steps;" (L. 81) and
"With his sweet voice and eyes, from savage men,/ His rest
and food." (ll. 80-81) has secured. He pores on the ruins
of the ancient world until their menaing "Flashed like
strong inspiration, and he saw/ The thrilling secrets of
the birth of time." (ll. 126-127)

Meanwhile an Arab maiden brought his food,
 Her daily portion, from her father's tent,
 And spread her matting for his couch, and stole
 From duties and repose to tend his steps: --
 Enamoured, yet not daring for deep awe
 To speak her love: -- and watched his nightly sleep,
 Sleepless herself, to gaze upon his lips
 Parted in slumber, whence the regular breath
 Of innocent dreams arose: then, when red morn
 Made paler the pale moon, to her cold home
 Wildered, and wan, and panting, she returned.
 (11. 129-139)

Yet our Poet-Narcissus will have nothing to do with this
 Arabian Echo, but wanders on, until, finally in the vale
 of Cashmire,

. . . A vision on his sleep
 There came, a dream of hopes that never yet
 Had flushed his cheek. He dreamed a veiled maid
 Sate near him, talking in low and solemn tones
Her voice was like the voice of his own soul
Heard in the calm of thought: its music long,
 Like woven sounds of streams and breezes, held
 His inmost sense suspended in its web
 Of many-coloured woof and shifting hues.
Knowledge and truth and liberty were her theme,
And lofty hopes of divine liberty,
Thoughts the most dear to him, and poesy,
Herself a poet.

(11. 149-161 Emphasis mine)

The Poet's soul has met a narcissistic extension of itself
 -- an inhuman vision. "Her voice is like the voice of his own
 soul," and "Knowledge and truth and virtue were her theme,
 And lofty hopes of divine liberty, -- but most important of
 all, she is "Herself a poet." Then comes the ultimate act
 of incest, the coupling of self with self:

His strong heart sunk and sickened with excess
 Of love. He reared his shuddering limbs and quelled
 His gasping breath, and spread his arms to meet
 Her panting bosom: . . . she drew back a while,
 Then yielding to the irresistable joy,
 With frantic gesture and short breathless cry
 Folded his frame in her dissolving arms. (11. 181-187)

The Poet's "divided self" has here merged, but in nothing more than an auto-erotic vision. The Poet's psyche and epipsyche join, but as we shall see, the results are disastrous. For the Poet, when he awakes, finds only

The cold white light of morning, the blue moon
 Low in the west, the clear and garish hills,
 The distinct valley and the vacant woods,
 Spread round him where he stood. Whither have fled
 The hues of heaven that canopied his bower
 Of yesternight? (ll. 193-198)

The cautionary aspects of the story, which must have struck the young Tennyson as he read, are beginning to make themselves apparent. In this context, one recalls the lines of Coleridge in "Dejection: An Ode":

O Lady! We receive but what we give,
 And in our life alone does nature live:
 Ours is her wedding garment, ours her shroud!
 And would we aught behold of higher worth,
 Than that inanimate cold world allowed
 To the poor loveless ever-anxious crowd,
 Ah! from the soul itself must issue forth
 A light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud,
 Enveloping the Earth --

The Alastor Poet's "wan eyes/ Gaze on the empty scene as vacantly/ As ocean's moon looks on the moon in heaven."
 (ll. 200-203) Where are "The sounds that soothed his sleep,/ The mystery and majesty of Earth,/ The joy, the exultation?"
 (ll. 198-200) In the words of Wordsworth:

Whither is fled the visionary gleam?
 Where is it now, the glory and the dream?

The rest of Shelley's poem is taken up with the Poet's frenzied search for the vision that had visited him, the vision that has now become "the fierce fiend of a distempered

dream": (l. 225)

And now his limbs were lean; his scattered hair
 Sered by the autumn of strange suffering
 Sung dirges in the wind; his listless hand
 Hung like dead bone within its withered skin;
 Life, and the lustre that consumed it, shone
 As in a furnace burning secretly
 From his dark eyes alone. The cottagers,
 Who ministered with human charity
 His human wants, beheld with wondering awe
 Their fleeting visitant. (ll. 248-257)

At length, the Poet reaches the "lone Chorasmian shore,"
 (l. 273), a "melancholy waste/ Of putrid marshes." (ll. 273-
 274) Convinced now that he can only find his "fair fiend"
 (l. 297) through death, the Poet sets forth in a suicidal
 sea-voyage in a rickety shallop. As the frail shallop of
 Shelley's Poet pursues its perilous way, Shelley, in the
 following lines, engages in a brilliant piece of foreshadowing,
 as well as interconnecting the inseparability of the Poet's
 goal, the unattainable vision with "those beloved eyes"
 and death:

Twilight, ascending slowly from the east,
 Entwined in dusker wreaths her braided locks
 O'er the fair front and radiant eyes of day;
 Night followed, clad with stars. On every side
 More horribly the multitudinous streams
 Of ocean's mountainous waste to mutual war
 Rushed in dark tumult thundering, as to mock
 The calm and spangled sky.

(ll. 337-344)

"Braided locks," "fair front," and "radiant eyes of day"
 suggest the Poet's vision; "the multitudinous waste" and "dark
 tumult" of the ocean suggest death, while, ironically, the
 star-spangled sky brings us back to the "eyes" of the vision.

At last, the Poet circumvents death in a whirlpool,

and finds himself on a placid stream that bears considerable resemblance to the stream described in the Tale, in I, 505-528. But Shelley's stream, or cove, is bedecked with yellow flowers obviously Narcissi, which "Forever gaze on their own drooping eyes,/ Reflected in the crystal calm." (ll. 407-408)

The shaping associations with the Narcissus myth are now clear, and will become clearer as the poet nears his final resting place. Here the Alastor Poet finds a well and gazes into it; but, instead of the lovely face of Narcissus,

. . . His eyes beheld
 Their own wan light through the reflected lines
 Of his thin hair, distinct in the dark depth
 Of that still fountain; as the human heart,
 Gazing in dreams over the gloomy grave
 Sees its own treacherous likeness there.
 (ll. 469-474)

The Poet has found death. And as he stumbles toward the inviolate and silent nook where he will breathe his last, Shelley, in a brilliant tour de force of ambiguity, combines Narcissus, the ravaged Poet and the vision that has driven the Poet to his untimely grave, into one beautiful figure:

. . . One step,
 One human step alone, has ever broken
 The stillness of its solitude: -- even that voice
 Which hither came, floating among the winds
 And led the loveliest among human forms
 To make their wild haunts the depository
 Of all the grace and beauty that endured
 Its motions, render up its majesty,
 And to the damp leaves and blue cavern mould,
 Nurses of rainbow flowers and branching moss,
 Commit the colors of that varying cheek
 That snowy breast, those dark and drooping eyes.
 (ll. 588-601)

And so Shelley's Poet quietly dies, finding his Nirvana, his last sight the lessening points of light of the horned moon. At the beginning of the poem, the Narrator begs the Great Parent, Nature, to transform him into a lyre -- that favorite image of the Romantics -- so that he may tell the story of the solitary Poet. In a grisly reversal, the dead Poet becomes a lute, a lute with "No sense, no motion, no divinity --" (l. 666)

A fragile lute, on whose harmonious strings
The breath of heaven did wander -- a bright stream
Once fed with many-voiced waves -- a dream
Of youth, which night and time have quenched for ever,
Still, dark, and dry, and unremembered now.
(ll. 667-671)²⁵

Surely the lesson of Alastor could not have been lost on the young Tennyson, whose boyhood dream was to become a poet, not a suicide. If Alastor "may be considered as allegorical of one of the most interesting situations of the human mind," the allegory of a mind thirsting for "intercourse with an intelligence similar to itself" and driven to an "untimely grave" by self-absorption; if Alastor may be considered as such an allegory, then surely The Lover's Tale may be considered an allegory in a similar yet different sense; the influence of Camilla -- that part of Tennyson's personality which turned pathologically inward to seek "an intelligence similar to itself" -- that beautiful but deadly influence must somehow be vitiated, and a sane balance between the inner and the outer worlds must be struck.



Of the chaotic Epipsychidion I shall say but little, since, in effect, it simply repeats the theme of Alastor.

Unlike the Poet's vision in Alastor, the "heroine" of Epipsychidion is an identifiable girl of flesh and blood -- Emilia Viviani, a beautiful young Italian who has been "imprisoned" by her father until a suitable marriage can be arranged. But in the deepest sense, she is as unreal as the "fair fiend" of Alastor, for she is really only what Shelley imagines her to be: that is, she is no more than Shelley's "self-created other,"²⁶ another idealized extension of Shelley's own personality.

After a rhapsodic hymn to his "Emily," Shelley recounts his unsuccessful search for his epipsyche, this "soul out of my soul." (l. 238) Each time he thinks he has found her, he realizes that he has been unsuccessful. Like the Poet of Alastor, the "I" of the poem "stumbling in my weakness and my haste" (l. 251) seeks

. . . among those untaught foresters
If I could find one form resembling hers,
In which she might have masked herself from me.
(ll. 253-255)

He encounters a prostitute, presumably,

. . . One, whose voice was venom'd melody
Sate by a well, under blue nightshade bowers;
The breath of her false mouth was like faint flowers,
Her touch was as electric poison, ---
(ll. 256-259)

Then came, one must assume, Harriet Westbrook, whose "honeyed words" (l. 270) betrayed; and finally, Mary,

The cold chaste Moon, the Queen of Heaven's bright isles,
 Who makes all beautiful on which she smiles,
 That wandering shrine of soft yet icy flame
 Which ever is transformed, yet still the same,
 And warms not but illumines.

(ll. 281-284)

And at last, finally, Emily appears upon the scene:

. . . this glorious One
 Floated into the cavern where I lay,
 And called my Spirit, and the dreaming clay
 Was lifted by the thing that dreamed below
 As smoke by fire, and in her beauty's glow
 I stood, and felt the dawn of my long night
 Was penetrating me with living light:
 I knew it was the vision veiled from me
 So many years -- that it was Emily.

(ll. 336-344)

Shelley knows that Emily's attraction is, metaphorically at least, fatal. Like the Poet of Alastor, he runs the risk of an "untimely death". Yet he proposes that Emily -- and Mary and perhaps Claire Clairmont, too -- accompany him to an island paradise somewhere in the Aegaeon. Shelley's language to Emily is laden with incestuous suggestion, although we have seen in Miyoshi that the notion of incest among the Romantics was largely metaphorical: "Spouse! Sister! Pilot of the fate/ Whose course has been so starless!" (ll. 130-131) and "I am not thine: I am a part of thee!" (l. 52)

Tennyson's Julian and Camilla, suckling at the same breast, achieve almost the same singleness of identity. Their baby lips

Kissed one bosom, ever drew from thence
 The stream of life, one stream, one life, one blood,
 One sustenance, which, still as thought grew large

Still larger moulding all the house of thought
 Made all our tastes and fancies like, perhaps --
 All -- all but one; and strange to me, and sweet,
 Sweet through strange years to know that whatsoe'er
 Our general mother meant for me alone,
 Our mutual mother meant for both of us:
 So what was earliest mine in earliest life,
 I shared with her in whom myself remains
 (I, 232-242)

But unlike the innocent Julian, Shelley's persona, crying out that "Would we two had been twins of the same mother!" (l. 45) proposes a frenetic physical-spiritual union with Emily in which all self-identity will be blotted out. The schism of the divided self will be healed:

We shall become the same, we shall be one
 Spirit within two frames, oh! wherefore two?
 One passion in twin hearts, which grows and grew,
 Till like to meteors of expanding flame,
 Those spheres instinct with it become the same,
 Touch, mingle, are transfigured, ever still
 Burning, yet ever unconsumable:
 In one another's substance finding food,
 Like flames too pure and bright and unimbued
 To nourish their bright lives with baser prey,
 Which point to heaven and cannot pass away:
 One hope within two wills, one will beneath
 Two overshadowing minds, one life, one death,
 One Heaven, one Hell, one immortality,
 And one annihilation.

(ll. 573-587)

But it won't wash. As Shelley himself said in his essay "On Love" this kind of communion is "unattainable." Shelley cries out:

. . . Woe is me!
 The winged words on which my soul would pierce
 Into the height of love's rare Universe,
 Are chains of lead around its flight of fire --
 I pant, I sink, I tremble, I expire!

(ll. 587-591)

Miyoshi says: "With rapidly rising pitch, the "I's" anticipation of the union brings on the frenzy of nympholepsy itself. . . . With the subsidence of this self-generated ecstasy, 'Emily' again joins the planets, the 'I' again finds himself unfinished, partial, and helplessly divided. Such self-division is the heart of the Shelleyan tragedy, not unique to Shelley but a forlorn pattern shared by many of the Victorians."²⁷

I think it cannot be stressed enough that Tennyson, even as early as the Cambridge period, surely knew that he must avoid the "forlorn pattern" of the Shelleyan tragedy. Though he must have come under the Shelleyan spell at Cambridge, he surely sensed that he must maintain "those tensions that run through his entire work and which, by their very nature, cannot be released or stressed on either pole, but must be accepted as the continued strain of opposites."²⁸ In short, unlike the Shelleyan hero, he must somehow keep Camilla from swallowing him up; he must somehow maintain that hard-won resolution of the dilemma of the divided self.

iii

An essential theme of Tennyson's Tale, as I implied in the last paragraph of the section immediately above, is the necessity of the hero-poet to strike a balance between polarities of commitment to society and narcissistic self-absorption. It is unquestionable (from his "Preface" to

Alastor) that Shelley was aware of the danger inherent in what must be an inevitably vain search for "intercourse with an intelligence similar to itself," i.e., an idealized but socially sterile self-projection.

To put narcissism in its proper scientific framework, let us briefly see what Sigmund Freud and a disciple, Herbert Marcuse, have to say on the subject. Freud states that:

Manifestations of the sexual instincts can be observed from the very first, but to begin with they are not yet directed towards any external object. The separate instinctual components of sexuality work independently of one another to obtain pleasure and find satisfaction in the subject's own body. This stage is known as that of auto-erotism and it is succeeded by one in which an object is chosen.

Further study has shown that it is expedient and indeed indispensable to insert a third stage between these two, or, putting it in another way, to divide the first stage, that of auto-erotism into two. At this intermediate stage, the importance of which is being made more and more evident by research, the hitherto isolated sexual instincts have already come together into a single whole and have also found an object. But this object is not an external one, extraneous to the subject, but it is his own ego, which has been constituted at about this same time. Bearing in mind pathological fixations of this new stage, which becomes observable later, we have given it the name of "narcissism." The subject behaves as though he were in love with himself; his egoistic instincts and his libidinal wishes are not yet separable. . . . 29

Further, Freud says, the narcissist "turns his emotional cathexes into persons, he peoples the outside world with them and meets his internal mental processes again outside himself --"³⁰ Or, in Marcuse's words on this crucial point, the narcissistic personality is not aware that his love is

self-love: "He lives by an Eros of his own, and he does not love only himself. (He does not know that the image he admires is his own.) If his erotic attitude is akin to death and brings death, then rest and sleep and death are not painfully distinguished: the Nirvana principle rules throughout all these stages. And when he dies he continues to live as the flower that bears his name."³¹ In other words, the Poet of Alastor is no more aware that the veiled maid of his dreams is an idealized projection of self than is Julian aware that his adored Camilla is an embodiment of his own self-love.

Shelley's Poet, like Narcissus, finds only death at the end of his search; and the hero of Epipsychidion dies as well: for Shelley, at least in these two poems, death and annihilation seem to be the only resolution possible. But Tennyson sees a way out, as we shall see in this and succeeding chapters: the renunciation of Camilla, and baptism into a new life which may include some kind of social commitment.³²

Various critics of Alastor -- Wasserman, Woodman, Hoffman and Praz -- agree that the Poet's veiled maid who lures the Poet to inevitable destruction are projections of the Poet's own ego. Wasserman states that "unless this kind of desire remains purely visionary, it can fulfill itself in the world only as narcissism or forbidden incest;"³³ Woodman says that the "poet in Alastor searches throughout Nature for the object of his imagination, even though he knows that the



object is a creature not of Nature, but of his own imagination." The poet's epipsyche, Woodman adds, is a "psychic projection."³⁴ And Hoffman refers to the "impassioned narcissism" of the Alastor poet;³⁵ while Mario Praz states bluntly that Shelley's "feminine ideal, as described in Alastor, is a mere projection of himself."³⁶ These statements are all true of the heroine of Epipsychidion; and it now remains to show that Tennyson's Camilla is analogous to the veiled maid and Emily.

Certainly to even the most casual reader of The Lover's Tale, Camilla embodies, in the words of Shelley's Alastor preface, "all of wonderful, or wise, or beautiful, which the poet, the philosopher, or the lover could depicture." But Camilla, symbolically speaking, is the creature of a solipsistic mind, as I believe Tennyson broadly hints in the following lines spoken by the distracted Julian after Camilla confesses that she loves Lionel. Julian speaks of the "oneness"³⁷ of himself and Camilla:

Was this the end?
 Why grew we then together in one plot?
 Why fed we from one fountain? drew one sun?
 Why were our mothers' branches of one stem?
 Why were we one in all things, save in that
 Where to have been one had been the cope and crown
 Of all I hoped and feared? -- if that same nearness
 Were father to this distance, and that one
 Vauntcourier to this double?

(II, 21-29)

And, in telling his friends of his thwarted love for Camilla, Julian speaks of his memory of her as "that perfectness/
 Which I do bear within me:" (I, 84-85, emphasis mine.) So the "one" that was Julian and Camilla has not entirely become



a "double" with the advent of Lionel. Nothing can eradicate the memory of those days when, in "the flush and dawn of youth, we lived together,/ Apart, alone together on those hills." (I, 183-184) Further kinship is emphasized in the following lines:

As love and I do number equal years,
 So she, my love, is of an age with me.
 How like each other was the birth of each!
 On the same morning, almost the same hour,
 Under the selfsame aspect of the stars,
 (Oh falsehood of all starcraft!) we were born.
 How like each other was the birth of each!
 (I, 189-195)

The note of incest then is sounded, by Tennyson, as the reader of the Tale is told that Julian and Camilla are first cousins, although, in effect, sister and brother:

She was my foster-sister: on one arm
 The flaxen ringlets of our infancies
 Wandered, the while we rested: one soft lap
 Pillowed us both: a common light of eyes
 Was on us as we lay:
 (I, 227-231)

.....

So what was earliest mine in earliest life,
 I shared with her in whom myself remains.
 (I, 241-242 Emphasis mine)

Further, "As was our childhood, so our infancy,/ They tell me, was a very miracle/ Of fellow-feeling and communion." (I, 244-245) Camilla and Julian "learned/ To lisp in tune together" (I, 251-252) and slept in the same crib in "our closest-drawn,/ Most loveliest, earthly heavenliest harmony." (I, 272-273) The connate quality of the Julian-Camilla childhood relationship is further suggested in the following lines:

This is my sum of knowledge -- that my love
 Grew with myself -- say rather, was my growth,
 My inward sap, the hold I have on earth,
 My outward circling air wherewith I breathe,
 Which yet upholds my life, and evermore
 Is to me daily life and daily death:
 For how should I have lived and not have loved?
 (I, 159-165)

Later, in adolescence, wandering in the secluded land of the Lover's Bay, Julian crowns himself and Camilla with garlands of the "self-same flower" (I, 335) and soon thereafter, upon climbing a hill to view the glorious sunset of Julian's last day of full happiness, Camilla speaks Julian's name, and he prays

Even that this name to which her gracious lips
 Did lend such gentle utterance, this one name,
 In some obscure hereafter, might inwreathe
 (How lovelier, nobler then!) her life, her love,
 With my life, love, soul, spirit, heart and strength.
 'Brother,' she said, 'let this be called henceforth
 The Hill of Hope;' and I replied, 'O sister,
 My will is one with thine; the Hill of Hope.'
 (I, 446-453)

Julian is too full of love for Camilla to speak more: but in retrospect he recalls that sunlit day before Camilla's revelation of her love for Lionel as "O Day which did enwomb that happy hour," (I, 475) and the word "enwomb," I believe -- along with all the other suggestions of incest implicit in the poem -- further strengthens what seems to me the inescapable conclusion that Julian's feeling for his "sister" does indeed violate one of the oldest taboos. And the innumerable suggestions of the "oneness" of Julian and Camilla make inescapable the conclusion that Julian's love is -- like the love of Shelley's protagonists in Alastor and Epipsychidion --



essentially narcissistic. For, as Miyoshi has pointed out, "The incestuous relation, in dissolving the usual familial as well as extrafamilial bonds between individuals, finally dissolves the identifying masks distinguishing one individual from another. Given the time-honored sense of the family as an extension of self, the incestuous act becomes the moment for the self meeting with the self."³⁸ One can, I believe, from this statement, conclude that there is really, in Julian's mind, no Camilla with an identity of her own, just as Shelley's heroines have no true self-identity. She is -- as far as the thematic intent of the poem goes -- "a mere extension of himself [Tennyson]" -- the embodiment of a kind of love that does not "teach any 'lesson' except perhaps the negative one that one cannot defeat death or forget and reject the call of life in the admiration of beauty."³⁹

Of Alastor, Ian Jack has this to say:

. . . the "pure and tender-hearted, perish through the intensity and passion of their search" for human sympathy, "when the vacancy of their spirit suddenly makes itself felt." The ambiguity of the poem springs from the fact that the poet is so obviously a projection of some of Shelley's own qualities and from the fact that he insists that the life of such a man is at once some way mistaken and yet of the greatest value to mankind. It is as if Don Quixote has written his autobiography. The conclusion of the poem does not claim that the poet survives after death, but rather that "birth and the grave," the very conditions of human life, are affected by the fact that such a man has lived. This is precisely what Shelley was to assert, more eloquently, at the end of Adonais. Alastor, then, is not an optimistic poem. It is a "solemn song." Set in its place in Shelley's development it may be read as an expression of the determination to follow his own destiny, although he realizes that

there is a sense in which he is deluded and that in any event such a course will not lead to personal happiness but to tragedy. The world that the poet paints is not a world of justice. It is a world in which the idealist is doomed. Shelley foresees his own doom, and accepts it. If Adonais is an elegy on Shelley himself by proxy, Alastor is an elegy on Shelley by anticipation.⁴⁰

But, if my reading of The Lover's Tale is correct, the poem is no quixotic self-directed elegy by an emergent laureate: for Julian, although he comes close to death after the dashing of his hopes by Camilla, survives, and rides off with his friend the narrator of The Golden Supper to what I believe we may tentatively extrapolate from the Tennysonian ethos is, perhaps, participation in life and its multitudinousness. In other words, Tennyson's Julian apparently escapes the infantilism of narcissistic self-love; Shelley's heroes do not.

Or, to put it yet another way: Lionel Stevenson, writing of Tennyson, says that "a poet, unlike other men, keeps an unintentional diary of his psychological evolution in his poems, . . ." And, Stevenson then states: "A man usually projects his anima (his unconscious) emotionally upon an actual woman; but with progress towards complete maturity the projection can give place to a more rational relationship. This very difficult and painful process is the only way to psychological completeness. In the process, the anima has to become recognized as a personified image of the unconscious, so that it can eventually be accepted as a normal psychological function." Stevenson then quotes Jung as saying that "'the relation with the anima is . . . a test of courage and -- more

than that -- a test by fire of all a man's spiritual and moral forces.'"⁴¹ Stevenson says that the Jungian anima is reflected in Tennyson's poetry by what he (Stevenson) calls "the high-born maiden" symbol. And he adds:

A remarkable feature of the situation was that the early phases of the symbol in Tennyson's poetry were strongly affected by another poet whose work was almost equally permeated with it. Tennyson suddenly and temporarily fell under the spell of Shelley just when he was susceptible also to the stirring of the anima within himself. Thus he provides a clear instance of the way in which a poet's personal unconscious motivations can become linked with material that the imagination derives from his reading. He could certainly not have been so profoundly attracted to Shelley's high-born maiden passages unless they had accorded with conditions in his own inner life.⁴²

Thus, I believe, a case can be made for interpreting the Tale as a parable of Tennyson's dawning recognition of the solipsistic tendencies within his own anima -- or unconscious -- and how he dealt with them.

In the next chapters, I shall try to demonstrate Tennyson's use of symbols -- most of which are Miltonic and Biblical in derivation -- and show how Julian-Tennyson is at last able manfully to turn Camilla (surely a high-born maiden symbol) over to her husband, Lionel, and ride away with the Narrator at the end of the poem:

"It is over: let us go" --
 There were our horses ready at the doors --
 We bade them no farewell but mounting these
 He past forever from his native land;
 And I with him, my Julian, back to mine.
 (IV, 381-385)

FOOTNOTES

Chapter I

¹ The Divided Self: A Perspective on the Literature of the Victorians (New York: New York University Press, 1969), pp. ix-x.

² Ibid., p. 107.

³ Miyoshi, xiv.

⁴ Miyoshi, p. 38. (*Italics mine.*)

⁵ Ibid., p. 68.

⁶ Miyoshi, p. 6.

⁷ Ibid., p. 5.

⁸ Ibid., p. 11.

⁹ Mario Praz, The Romantic Agony, trans. Angus Davidson, 2nd. ed. (1933; rpt. Meridian Books, 1960), p. 69.

¹⁰ M. H. Abrams, et. al., eds., The Norton Anthology of English Literature (Revised), 2 vols., (New York: W. W. Norton, 1968) II, 708.

¹¹ Byron, George Gordon, Lord, The Complete Poetical Works of Byron, "Cambridge Edition" (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1933). All quotations from Byron's works are taken from this volume.

¹² Charles Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson, pp. 33-34.

¹³ Buckley, Tennyson: The Growth of a Poet, p. 265.

¹⁴ Charles Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson, p. 34.

¹⁵ Amy Cruse, The Englishman and his Books in the Early Nineteenth Century, (London: George G. Harrap & Co., Ltd., 1930), p. 123.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 123-124.

17 Ibid., p. 125.

18 The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley, eds. Roger Ingpen and Walter E. Peck, 10 vols. (New York: The Gordian Press, 1965), VI, 201-202.

19 Miyoshi, p. 11.

20 Quotations from Shelley's poetry and the "Preface" to Alastor are taken from John Keats and Percy Bysshe Shelley: Complete Poetical Works, (New York: The Modern Library, n.d.), hereinafter referred to as Shelley, Poetical Works.

21 Shelley, Poetical Works, p. 1.

22 Ibid., p. 1-2.

23 Earl Wasserman, Shelley: A Critical Reading (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1971), p. 18.

24 Ibid., p. 9.

25

The lyre was certainly a common enough Romantic symbol, but it is interesting to note here that Tennyson, in the beginning of the Tale also alludes to that instrument. Julian is speaking:

Even now, the Goddess of the Past, that takes
The heart, and sometimes touches but one string
That quivers, and is silent, and sometimes
Sweeps suddenly all its half-mouldered chords
To some old melody, begins to play
That air which pleased her first. I feel thy breath;
I come, great Mistress of the ear and eye:
(I, 16-22)

26 Miyoshi, p. 74.

27 Ibid., p. 75.

28 See "Introduction," p. 3.

29 Totem and Taboo, trans. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1950), pp. 88-89.

30 Ibid., p. 92.

31 Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud (1955; rpt. New York: Vintage Books, 1962), p. 152. Emphasis mine.

32 In later chapters of this dissertation I shall discuss fully the ambiguity of the poem's ending and the ultimate fate of Julian.

33 Wasserman, p. 28.

34 Ross Greig Woodman, The Apocalyptic Vision in the Poetry of Shelley (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964), p. 23.

35 Harold L. Hoffman, An Odyssey of The Soul: Shelley's Alastor (New York: Columbia University Press, 1933), p. 26.

36 Praz, The Romantic Agony, p. 88.

37 Interestingly, this motif of "oneness" finds a counterpart in Emily Bronte's Wuthering Heights, (New York: W. W. Norton, 1963) where the tempestuous Cathy refers to Heathcliff: "It would degrade me to marry Heathcliff now; so he shall never know how I love him; and that, not because he's handsome, Nelly, but because he's more myself than I am. Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same. . . ." (p. 72) Cathy continues:

. . . My great miseries in this world have been Heathcliff's miseries, and I watched and felt each from the beginning; my great thought in living is himself. If all else perished, and he remained, I should still continue to be; and if all else remained, and he were annihilated, the Universe would turn to a mighty stranger. I should not seem a part of it. My love for Linton is like the foliage in the woods. Time will change it, I'm well aware, as winter changes the trees. My love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath -- a source of little visible delight, but necessary. Nelly, I am Heathcliff -- he's always, always in my mind -- not as a pleasure, any more than I am always a pleasure to myself -- but as my own being -- so don't talk of our separation again -- it is impracticable; and --"

(p. 74)

That Tennyson was familiar with the notion of the doppelgänger["] is amply demonstrated in a monograph titled Tennyson's Doppelgänger: "Balin and Balan," published by the Tennyson Society, Tennyson Research Centre, 1971. And an article in Victorian Poetry, Vol. VII, No. 4 (Winter, 1969), 285-298, by Fred Kaplan, titled "Woven Paces and Waving Hands: Tennyson's Merlin as Fallen Artist," points out that in the "Merlin and Vivien" Idyll "Vivien is a projection of the magician, the

product of the dark melancholy which results from some negative force within Merlin. . . . Tennyson combines an atmosphere of illicit sexual fulfillment and the death wish of the imagination against a turbulent, symbolic landscape to represent the artist's vision of hell -- the end of energy, the end of 'use.'"

38 Miyoshi, p. 11.

39 Marcuse, p. 150.

40 English Literature: 1815-1832 (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1963), p. 96.

41 "The High-Born Maiden Symbol in Tennyson," Critical Essays on the Poetry of Tennyson, ed. John Killham (1960; rpt. New York: Barnes & Noble, 1967), p. 135.

42 Ibid., p. 136.

CHAPTER II

The Lover's Tale and Paradise Lost

Long before he had read Shelley Tennyson was familiar with Milton. Sir Charles Tennyson tells us that the poet's father, the Rev. George Clayton Tennyson, presented a second edition of Paradise Lost to Alfred when the youngster went away to school at Louth at the age of eight.¹ After Alfred's return from Louth in 1820, Dr. Tennyson, who had a real enthusiasm for literature and an excellent library, took over his sons' education; and the boys early acquired a knowledge of the Greek and Latin classics as well as the English writers represented in the library at Somersby rectory -- including Milton.²

Tracing the poetic influences at work on young Alfred at that time, Charles Tennyson says that -- after a period in which Walter Scott was in the ascendant -- "came a Miltonic phase, which took shape in that remarkable poem Armageddon, dating probably from his fifteenth year."³ Much of this poem is "undigested Milton," according to the poet's biographer.⁴

By the time Alfred came to write The Lover's Tale a few years later, he had, I believe, more thoroughly digested Milton: so much so that he was able to take certain thematic and imagistic elements from Paradise Lost⁵ and bend and shape them to suit his own purposes in a most ingenious way.

The story of Julian's unfortunate love affair is at least in part a secular echo of the Eden story. And -- if we accept the thesis that the Tale is a kind of quasi-allegory of Tennyson's rejection of aestheticism or "godlike isolation" -- I think a case can be made that Julian's loss of Camilla (his expulsion from Eden) follows the well-worn formula of the felix culpa.

But if the Tale echoes Paradise Lost and the biblical story of the Fall, these are echoes with a difference: the uses to which Tennyson puts elements of Paradise Lost and the Judaeo-Christian tradition inescapably call to mind Coleridge's famous description in Chapter XIII of the Biographia Literaria of the function of the poetic imagination, which "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate."

Probably the most complex figure in The Lover's Tale (from the point of view of the Miltonic source) is Lionel, the successful lover who wins Camilla away from Julian. For Lionel is at least in part an amalgam of Milton's Satan and Christ; and his symbolic function in the poem then is a dual one.

Lionel, like Milton's Satan, possesses a clever tongue: "Fair speech was his and delicate of phrase" -- this description of Lionel appears twice in the Tale (the wording does not vary): in I, 707, and in IV, 270. In Book IX of Milton's poem, we learn something of Satan's gift for "fair speech" when the fawning serpent "glozes" (549) -- flatters -- Eve,



and successfully tempts her as

. . . some orator renowned
In Athens or free Rome, where eloquence
Flourished; . . .

(IX, 670-672)

In Paradise Lost, Satan is "the wily Adder, blithe and glad" (IX, 625) -- and the "blissful" Lionel, who comes to Julian after Camilla's crushing (to Julian) revelation of her love for Lionel, appears:

Like a careless and greedy heir
That scarce can wait the reading of the will.

(II, 664-665)

Further, Lionel seems to the shattered and half-hysterical Julian to possess an unmistakable serpentine quality, even as he attempts to console Julian:

. . . but he
Bent o'er me, and my neck his arm upstayed.
I thought it was an adder's fold, and once
I strove to disengage myself, but fail'd,
Being so feeble:

(I, 678-782)

Earlier (I, 612), Julian, hallucinating, refers to a "golden snake" nestling in "this bosom-throne of Love;" and, of course, Milton's Satan-serpent has a "burnished neck of verdant gold." (IX, 501)

But as I stated earlier, Lionel apparently serves a dual function in the poem. Because Camilla loves Lionel, Julian is deprived of his Eden, that land of the "Lover's Bay," that earthly paradise where:

. . . all excellence that ever was
Had drawn herself from many thousand years,
And all the separate Edens of this earth,
To centre in this place and time.

(I, 538-541)



Because of Lionel, Julian "fell,/ Beggar'd for ever --"
(I, 658-659). But at this point Lionel appears to Julian:

Robed in those robes of light I must not wear,
With that great crown of beams about his brows --
Came like an angel to a damned soul
To tell him of the bliss he had with God --
(I, 660-663)

Now there is no hint in this passage of Milton's "wily Adder": rather there is a clear echo of Milton's Son of God who descends to the Garden after the transgression as judge and intercessor, blazing forth "unclouded deity" (X, 65); or perhaps Lionel here parallels Milton's vision of the Archangel Michael and his "cohort bright" (XI, 127) of Cherubim.

Thus, Tennyson has given to the single figure of Lionel attributes which Milton assigns separately to Satan and Christ; or, if not Christ, some member of the heavenly host. Lionel is, therefore, the agent of Julian's fall -- and if Julian's "fall" represents a separation from the isolating and incestuous world of the "Lover's Bay", as it surely does, Lionel is also, in a very real sense, the agent of Julian's redemption and his "fortunate fall."⁶ This, I believe, is the meaning of the comparison of Lionel to Christ or an angel.

There are other elements in Tennyson's poem which form striking parallels with passages in Paradise Lost. In Milton's poem, Adam:

Waiting, desirous of her [Eve's] return, had wove
Of choicest flowers a garland to adorn
Her tresses, and her rural labors crown
As reapers oft are wont their harvest queen.
(IX, 839-842)



Eve, returning, with "countenance blithe," (IX, 886) recounts to a horrified Adam the story of her fateful interview with the serpent, and

From his slack hand the garland wreathed for Eve
Down dropped, and all the faded roses shed.
(IX, 892-893)

In Tennyson's poem, Julian too

. . . gathered the wild herbs and for her [Camilla's] brows
And mine made garlands of the selfsame flower,
Which she took smiling, and with my work thus
Crown's her clear forehead.
(I, 334-337)

Among the flowers Julian weaves into the crowns is the poppy -- "Hued with the scarlet of a fierce sunrise,/ Like to the wild youth of an evil prince,. . ." (I, 345-346). The reference to passion, to sexual love, is unmistakable here, and (I shall return to this point directly) Julian crowns Camilla and himself; but

. . . While I gazed
My coronal slowly disentwined itself,
And fell between us both; . . .
(I, 352-354)

The significance of the disentwining scarlet coronal falling between Julian and Camilla (and, in effect, separating them) is two-fold: first, it foreshadows Camilla's imminent revelation to Julian that she loves Lionel, and not Julian; second, and most important, it points up the latent -- and illicit -- incestuous sexual element in Julian's feeling for Camilla.

Julian is, of course, unable or unwilling to admit the submerged element of passion involved in his "brotherly"



attachment to Camilla, but he comes close to true self-revelation in the following passage:

So Love, arraigned to judgment and to death
 Received unto himself a part of blame,
 Being guiltless, as an innocent prisoner,
 Who, when the woful sentence hath been past,
 And all the clearness of his fame hath gone
 Beneath the shadow of the curse of man,
 First falls asleep in swoon, wherefrom awaked,
 And looking round upon his tearful friends
 Forthwith and in his agony conceives
 A shameful sense as of a cleaving crime --
 For whence without some guilt should such grief be?
 (I, 773-783)

Unlike Milton's Adam, Tennyson's Julian cannot bring himself to admit a loss of innocence and purity, or the advent of what Milton calls "foul concupiscence" (IX, 1078). But the fall of Adam and Tennyson's Julian are signalled by somewhat similar natural phenomena:

Earth trembled from her entrails, as again
 In pangs, and Nature gave a second groan;
 Sky loured, and muttering thunder, some sad drops
 Wept at completing of the mortal sin
 Original; . . .
 (IX, 1000-1004)

Then had the earth beneath me yawning cloven
 With such a sound as when an iceberg splits
 From cope to base -- had Heaven from all her doors,
 With all her golden thresholds clashing, rolled
 Her heaviest thunder -- I had lain as dead,
 Mute, blind, and motionless as then I lay!
 Dead, for henceforth there was no life for me!
 (I, 591-597)

And, even as Adam begs after his transgression

. . . Oh might I here
 In solitude live savage, in some glade
 Obscured, where highest woods impenetrable
 To star or sunlight, spread their umbrage broad
 And brown as evening! Cover me ye pines,
 Ye cedars, with innumerable boughs
 Hide me, . . .
 (IX, 1084-1090)



so too, does Julian wish -- after his fall from grace --
some kind of sylvan oblivion:

. . . Would I had lain
Until the plaited ivy-tress had wound
Round my worn limbs, and the wild brier had driven
Its knotted thorns through my unpaining brows,
Leaning its roses on my faded eyes.
The wind had blown above me, and the rain
Had fallen upon me, and the gilded snake
Had nestled in this bosom-throne of Love,
But I had been at rest for evermore.
(I, 606-614)

And, indeed, Julian does "live savage" for many months alone:

From that time forth I would not see her more;
But many weary moons I lived alone --
Alone, and in the heart of the great forest.
Sometimes upon the hills beside the sea
All day I watch'd the floating isles of shade,
And sometimes on the shore, upon the sands
Insensibly I drew her name, until
The meaning of the letters shot into
My brain; anon the wanton billow wash'd
Them over, till they faded like my love.
The hollow caverns heard me -- the black brooks
Of the mid-forest heard me -- the soft winds,
Laden with thistle-down and seeds of flowers,
Paused in their course to hear me, for my voice
Was all of thee; the merry linnet knew me,
The squirrel knew me, and the dragon-fly
Shot by me like a flash of purple fire.
The rough brier tore my bleeding palms; the hemlock
Brow-high, did strike my forehead as I past;
Yet trod I not the wild-flower in my path
Nor bruised the wild-bird's egg.
(II, 1-21)

To sum up: an essential thematic element in Milton's
epic and Tennyson's poem is, of course, the loss of innocence:
Adam freely pleads guilty; Tennyson's persona is (perhaps
unwittingly) more devious. But it seems to me that the
disentwining of Julian's blood-colored coronal ("Hued with
the scarlet of a fierce sunrise,/ Like to the wild growth

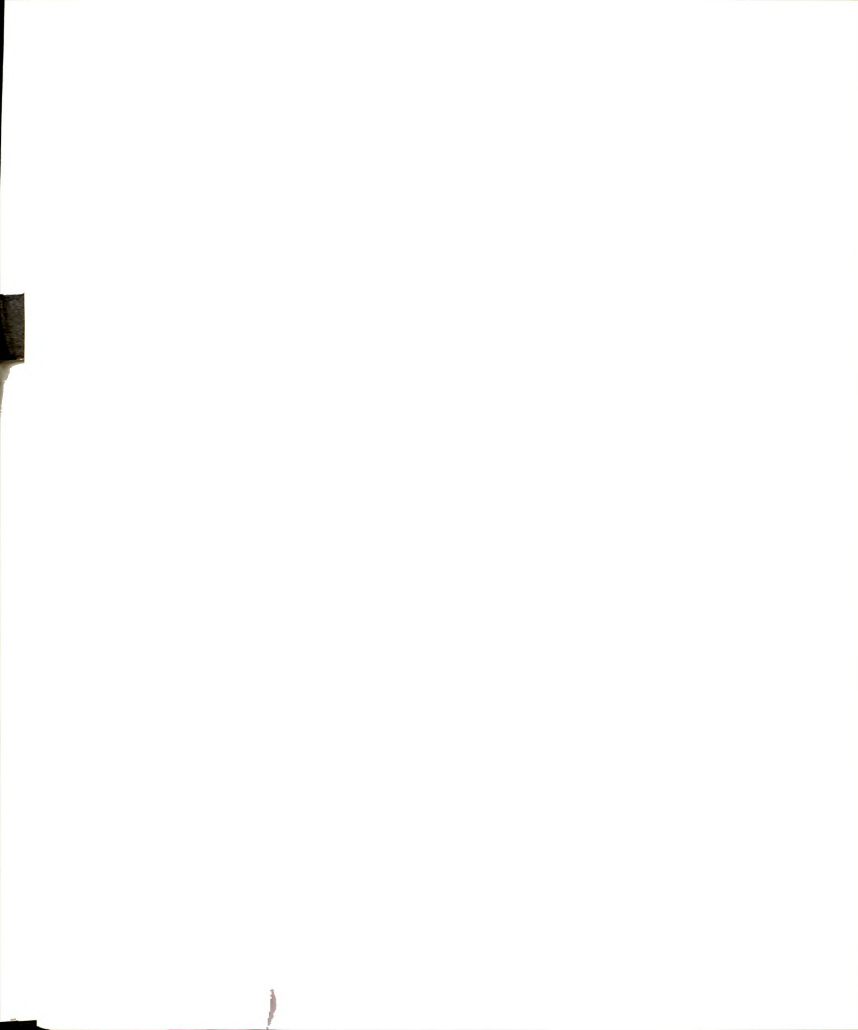
of an evil prince") with its separating effect is a crucial and highly revealing symbol for Julian's submerged sexual feelings toward a girl who is, to all intents and purposes, his sister. One might argue, I suppose, that this is unconscious symbolizing on Tennyson's part; but it is equally possible to see the symbol as a quite deliberate (and typically Victorian) way of putting the matter. The latter argument is substantiated by what seems to me the premeditated art which Tennyson has employed in judiciously drawing upon particular incidents, themes, and images in Milton's great verse paragraphs to advance the meaning of his own work.

Most striking, perhaps, is Tennyson's handling of the felix culpa theme, a theme most germane to the thrust of this paper: through the agency of Lionel, Julian is deprived, fortunately if painfully, of Camilla and the paradise she represents -- really a kind of anti-Eden where Julian's personality presumably would have remained fixed in its narcissistic self-regard, like a fly in amber. Julian has made of Camilla little more than a vehicle for the projection of his own psyche; for growth -- for a Miltonic "Paradise within thee, happier far" (Xii, 587) -- he must be stripped of his Camilla. This Lionel effectively does; and perhaps it is at this moment that Camilla (and Julian, too) take a giant step toward self-identity.

Nonetheless, Julian (in his own mind) has been deprived of his Eden and his Eve: he is a homeless waif. From somewhere



must come that "Paradise within thee/ Happier far" -- true
grace. And through what better agency than expiatory cleansing
by water, that archetypically regenerative and redemptive
element?



FOOTNOTES

The Lover's Tale and Paradise Lost

¹ Sir Charles Tennyson, Tennyson, p. 12.

² Ibid., pp. 31-32.

³ Ibid., p. 33.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ The text of Paradise Lost that I have used is contained in The Poems of John Milton, James Holly Hanford's edition (New York: Ronald Press Co., 1953). In his introduction to Paradise Lost, Hanford points out the many sources besides the Bible, which Milton drew upon: biblical commentators, Jewish as well as Christian; Grotius' Latin play, Adamus Exal; the Italian Andreini's Adamo; Shakespeare; Spenser; Giles and Phineas Fletcher; Tarso and Aristo, among others. It is, of course, possible that Tennyson may have drawn upon some of these writers as well as Milton.

⁶ In Book XII of Paradise Lost, Milton's Angel tells Adam:

. . . only add
Deeds to thy knowledge answerable, add faith,
Add virtue, patience, temperance, add love,
By name to come called charity, the soul
Of all the rest; then wilt thou not be loth
To leave this Paradise, but shalt possess
A Paradise within thee, happier far.
(ll. 581-587)



CHAPTER III

Water Symbolism, Redemption, and the Holy Communion in The Lover's Tale

To even the most casual reader of Tennyson's poetry, it is apparent that water is a frequently-used symbol -- a symbol employed in wide and fluctuating contexts. The water symbol is archetypal; but among the Victorians, and particularly Tennyson, it achieved almost universal currency as a major means for advancing and elucidating thematic intent.¹

In The Lover's Tale water is perhaps the dominant metaphor: the references to sea, stream, fountains, tears, rain, and other liquid agents are almost too numerous to count. Tennyson uses water imagery in three major ways, all closely connected to the Tale's basic theme: first, the sheltered Lover's Bay (inextricably linked with Camilla) is a symbol of isolation, withdrawal, and retreat from the Victorian march of mind into an isolating self-consciousness; second, water symbolizes both life and death; third, and closely connected with water as a metaphor for death and life, is its use in the poem as a regenerative or redemptive force, an agent of the "little death" in life through which the soul must pass to rebirth -- in Jerome Hamilton Buckley's words in The Victorian Temper, "the symbol of both life and the dying unto life, of the everlasting peace and the 'eternal

process' of regeneration."²

Taking Tennyson's uses of the water symbol in the order listed above, let us first consider the Lover's Bay and its contiguous countryside as an emblem for the isolation of Julian and Camilla from the "real" world. The poem opens thus:

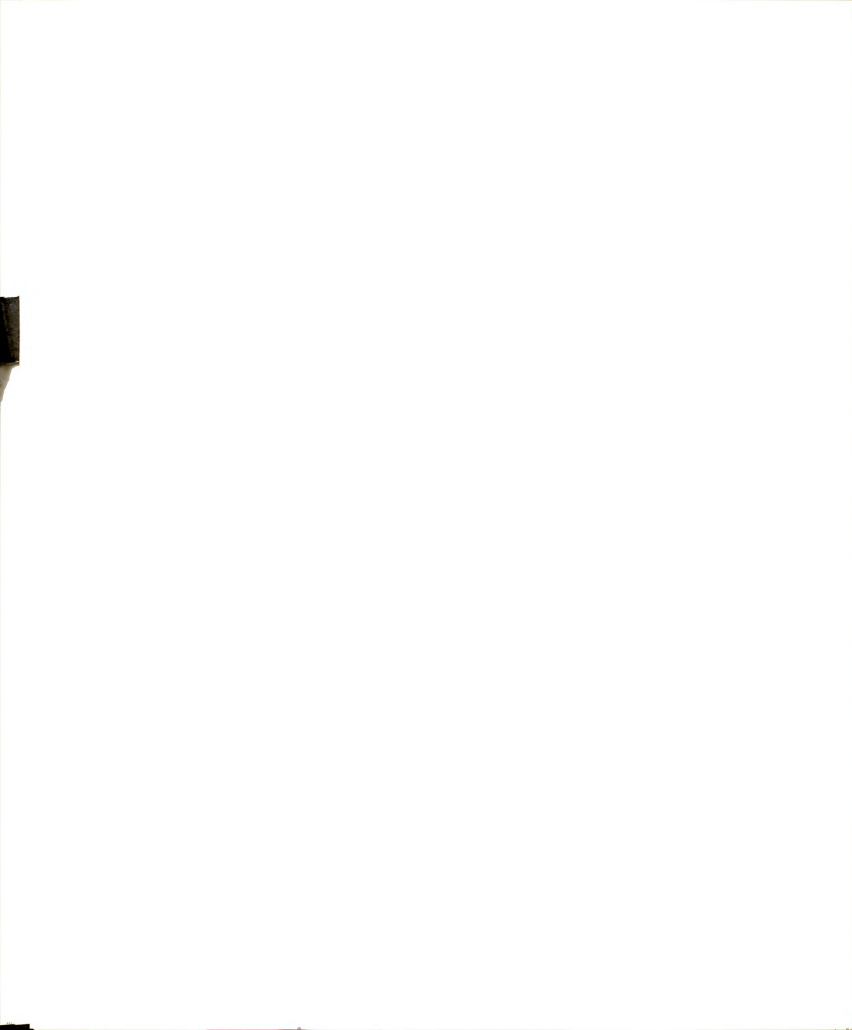
Here far away, seen from the topmost cliff,
 Filling with purple gloom the vacancies
 Between the tufted hills, the sloping seas
 Hung in mid-heaven, and half-way down rare sails
 White as white clouds, floated from sky to sky.
 Oh! Pleasant breast of waters, quiet bay,
 Like to a quiet mind in the loud world,
 Where the chafed breakers of the outer sea
 Sank powerless, as anger falls aside
 And withers on the breast of peaceful love; . . .
 (I, 1-10)

This idyllic retreat is further described as a secure refuge from the hostile "outer sea":

. . . the semi-circle
 Of dark-blue waters and the narrow fringe
 Of curving beach -- its wreaths of dripping green --
 Its pale pink shells -- the summerhouse aloft
 That opened on the pines with doors of glass,
 A mountain nest -- the pleasure boat that rocked,
 Light green with its own shadow, keel to keel,
 Upon the dappled dimplings of the wave
 That blanched upon its side.
 (I, 36-44)

Here Julian and Camilla dally in their splendidly circumscribed isolation:

. . . borne about the bay or safely moored
 Beneath a low-browed cavern, where the tide
 Plashed, sapping its worn ribs; and all without
 The slowly-ridging rollers on the cliffs
 Clashed; calling to each other, and through the arch
 Down those loud waters, like a setting star,
 Mixt with the gorgeous west the lighthouse shone,
 And silver-smiling Venus ere she fell



Would often loiter in her balmy blue
To crown it with herself.

(I, 52-61)

In the lines above, the Lover's Bay and the Julian-Camilla relationship are linked with the "gorgeous west;" and G. Robert Stange, in his essay "Tennyson's Garden of Art: A Study of The Hesperides," says that the west, to Tennyson, is "a place of twilight, of rest, or warmth and secrecy." Stange continues: "The West . . . is essentially the land of 'The Lotus Eaters' 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."³ Further, in Stange's words, "the West comes to stand for the sheltering past and the East for the rigorous and uncertain future.":

We know [Stange writes] that for Tennyson the question of the social responsibility of the poet was an enduring problem. All through his career some poems announce a reasoned intention to participate in the world's work while others reveal a yearning for aesthetic detachment. The recurring antithesis of East and West is one means by which this conflict is expressed. The Hesperides, interpreted as a dramatization of the conditions of poetic creation, affirms the value of an art which is withdrawn, introspective and sensuous.⁴

Both The Hesperides and The Lover's Tale are poems that, each in its own way, strike "Tennyson's recurrent note of longing for a vanished or unattainable paradise and [explore] the persistent theme of the inhuman fascination of isolation and retreat."⁵ And it is interesting to note that Tennyson suppressed The Hesperides after its initial publication in



1832 throughout his life,⁶ and that he only published The Lover's Tale in its finished form in 1897, after writing a concluding section which seems to reject "inhuman . . . isolation and retreat."

Stange offers this explanation of the suppression of The Hesperides after the 1832 edition:

I think . . . likely that the poem was put aside because it expressed attitudes that the poet did not wish to make public later in his career. As a young man, Tennyson had assumed a position of artistic detachment and poetic independence, but as his reputation increased he became more strongly influenced by the public demand for a vates. In his middle years we find him making a conscious effort to transmit to the people the ethos of his age, and to use his poetry as a didactic weapon. Yet, in a sense, Tennyson's will remained divided. In his more popular work there is an attempt either to suppress his conflicting desires for social engagement and for the life of art, or to resolve his conflict in favour of "the whole life" -- to treat the withdrawal to a palace of art or to a lotos-land as an aberration. The Hesperides is a statement of what "the people's poet" came to feel was the devil's side in this continuing debate. So for a variety of reasons, the socially responsible Tennyson may have found it desirable not to include The Hesperides in his later collections.⁷

So The Hesperides was suppressed and the Tale published, but only after the poet added an ending to the Tale from which we can perhaps infer a rejection of withdrawal and an affirmation of the participation in the processes of active life.

At any rate, until the advent of Lionel, Julian and Camilla linger in their Eden, "apart, alone together" (I, 184) in their



. . . land of promise flowing with the milk
 And honey of delicious memories!
 And down to sea, and far as eye could ken
 Each way from verge to verge a Holy Land,
 Still growing holier as you neared the bay,
 For there the Temple stood.

(I, 327-332)

But an ominous note impinges upon Eden. The pair one day finds a "dead man cast upon the shore" (I, 289). And the dead man, perhaps a drowned seaman washed up from the "outer sea," is, as we shall see, a clear foreshadowing, a portent, of things to come. The dead man is the first encroachment of the world outside upon Julian and Camilla's paradise.

Now, before discussing water as a regenerative agent in the Tale, let us review Tennyson's use of water as a metaphor for life and death. Julian, returning to the country of the Lover's Bay in his real or assumed old age, tells us that, after his rejection by Camilla:

. . . I had died
 But from my farthest lapse, my latest ebb,
 Thine image, like a charm of light and strength
 Upon the waters, pushed me back again
 On these deserted sands of barren life.

(I, 85-89)

Like the "all-enduring camel" he is kept alive by his memory of Camilla. Like the camel, Julian has kept within himself

A draught of that sweet fountain that he loves,
 To stay his feet from falling, and his spirit
 From bitterness of death.

(I, 136-139)

Julian and his foster-sister have, as babes, kissed "one



bosom, ever drew from thence/ The stream of life, one stream,
one life, one blood," (I, 231-232). And Camilla's very
eyes reflect the "redundant life" within her:

. . . for they go back
And farther back, and still withdraw themselves
Quite into the deep soul, that evermore
Fresh springing from her fountains in the brain
Still pouring through floods with redundant life
Her narrow portals.

(I, 77-82)

(There is perhaps here a muted parallel with the springing
fountains of Camilla's brain and the "mighty fountain momentarily
forced" (l. 19) in Coleridge's "Kubla Khan." Interestingly
enough, there is in Milton's Paradise Lost a subterranean
stream in Eden:

Southward through Eden went a river large,
Nor changed his course, but through the shaggy hill
Passed underneath ingulfed, for God had thrown
That mountain as his garden mould, high raised
Upon the rapid current, which through veins
Of porous earth with kindly thirst up drawn,
Rose a fresh fountain, and with many a rill
Watered the garden; . . .

[IV, 223-230])

Camilla's and Julian's blood runs free as mountain
streams (I, 319-320) in this land of glistening brooks:
yet, there is the dead man on the shore and the "earth-
quake cloven chasm" with its wild stream into which, according
to legend, a "woful man" had thrust his wife and child and
then hurled himself. (I, 370-374) Here again surely are
further echoes of Coleridge's "Kubla Khan":

But on! that deep romantic chasm which slanted
Down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover!
A savage place! A holy and enchanted



As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted
By woman wailing for her demon lover.

(ll. 12-16)

Tennyson describes the fateful stream of the Tale in images that unmistakably indicate the ambiguity of the stream's symbolic meaning. Here, in these crucial lines, with their many intermingled images of life and death, Tennyson is, I believe, setting up the polarities necessary to Julian's conversion experience. Life and the death-in-life requisites for regeneration and redemption are here, by metaphorical implication, closely juxtaposed as a foreshadowing of Julian's "baptism":

We trod the shadow of the downward hill;
We past from light to dark. On the other side
Is scooped a cavern and a mountain hall,
Which none have fathomed. If you go far in
(The country people rumour) you may hear
The moaning of the woman and the child,
Shut in the secret chambers of the rock.
I too have heard a sound -- perchance of streams
Running far on within its inmost halls,
The home of darkness; but the cavern-mouth,
Half-overtrailed with a wanton weed,
Gives birth to a brawling brook, that passing lightly
Adown a natural stair of tangled roots
Is presently received in a sweet grave
Of eglantines, a place of burial
Far lovelier than its cradle; for unseen
But taken with the sweetness of the place,
It makes a constant bubbling melody
That drowns the nearer echoes. Lower down
Spreads out a little lake, that, flooding, leaves
Low banks of yellow sand; and from the woods
That belt it rise three dark, tall cypresses, --
Three cypresses, symbols of mortal woe,
That men plant over graves.

(I, 505-527)

I believe it will be appropriate here, before further specific consideration of water as regenerative agent in The



Lover's Tale, to move into a survey of the Victorians' aspirations toward spiritual fulfillment, and the message of redemption that informs so many of their literary works. "Throughout Victorian literature," Buckley writes, "ran the message of redemption. Poet, novelist, and sermonwriter joined to urge the supreme necessity of spiritual purgation, of the little death-in-life, the dying of the uncorrupted self."⁸ Buckley cites most of the major Victorians in support of this contention: Carlyle, Arnold, Newman, Mill, Dickens, George Eliot, Meredith, Browning, Kingsley -- and, of course, Tennyson.⁹

Since Kingsley, Dickens and Swinburne are particularly preoccupied with the efficacy of water as an agent of conversion and purification, I believe it to be germane at this point to summarize Buckley's discussion of their approach to the "supreme necessity of spiritual purgation" before moving back to Tennyson.

Buckley tells us that it "testified well to the diffusion of the water-symbol that he [Kingsley] made it the central motif of a widely-popular fairy-tale allegory," The Water Babies. Tom, the sooty chimney-sweep of the story, hears the song of purification of the river as it flows past the grimy city. Aware of the filth that besmirches his body, Tom becomes obsessed with cleanliness: "And so resolved he enters the river where he sinks into a healing 'death-by-water' which he has not learned to fear." But salvation is not easy; Tom must pass through pain and despair before he

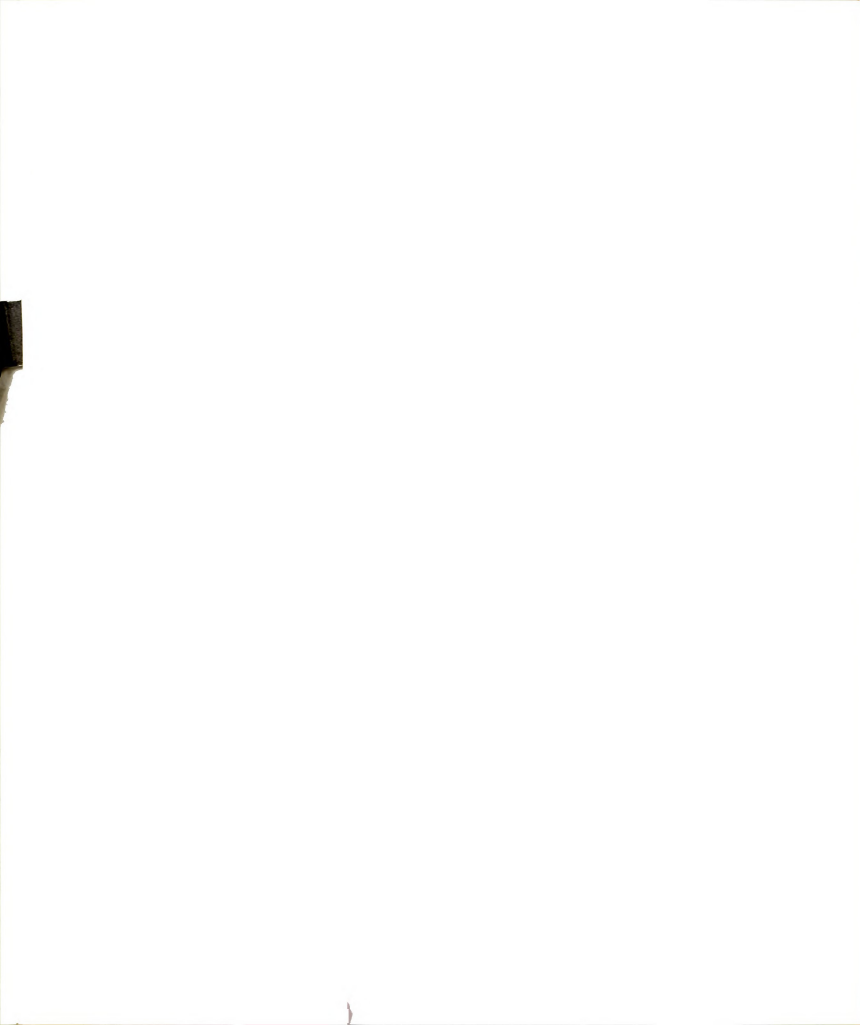


is sufficiently cleansed. At last he emerges from his ordeal, a "clean soul, fit to take his place in the busy world as 'a great man of science' -- a player with railroads and maker of telegraphs!"¹⁰

Dickens, too, "though not given to subtle metaphor, was fully conscious of the evocative sea-image and quite familiar with the poetic overtones of 'death-by-water.'" Buckley briefly discusses David Copperfield, Hard Times, and Great Expectations, saying of the latter novel that "the watery 'baptism' is clearly related to the events of a moving narrative; yet not a little of the emotional effect may spring from free association with the established images of spiritual renewal."¹¹

Of Swinburne, Buckley writes that in "'Thalassius' (1880) his poetic apologia, he made the sea symbol the key to an allegory of spiritual conversion." Buckley adds: "Thus the pattern of conversion was complete; Thalassius and so, therefore, Swinburne himself, the last great poetic voice of his generation, had ultimately arrived at the solemn assent to the cause of man which many a Victorian, each in his own way, had painfully achieved."¹²

Let us turn back now to Tennyson. Significantly enough for the aims of this chapter, Buckley says that: "From the beginning, Tennyson's verse was pregnant with baptismal suggestion."¹³



I suppose that In Memoriam easily could be called the paradigm for the conversion experience of the nineteenth century. It is, indeed, a poem "pregnant with baptismal suggestion.": there is the journey of Hallam's body from the Danube to his resting place beside the Severn; there is the ebb and flow of the Wye beside which Tennyson mourns; and there is the dream-vision in which Tennyson is rowed out to a ghostly ship to meet the soul of Hallam. This sea-voyage by Tennyson (or his spirit) suggests an entry into a new life; it occurs (in the poem's time-scheme) immediately before the Tennyson family's remove from Somersby rectory -- so fraught with memories of the lost Hallam -- and marks a significant point in the "way of the soul" from doubt and despair to acceptance, from "an isolating self-consciousness to . . . the saner perspective of dispassion and . . . the tragic realities of an objective world:. . ." ¹⁴ In the section of In Memoriam in question (CIII), Tennyson describes his dream-vision "On that last night before we went/ From out the doors where I was bred, . . ." He dreams that he dwells in a hall with a group of maidens who ". . . sang of what is wise and good/ And graceful." They sing to a statue of Hallam, "The shape of him I loved and love, . . ." Then a dove brings a summons from the sea, a message from the dead Hallam. The maidens:

. . . wept and wailed, but led the way
To where a little shallop lay
At anchor in the flood below;



Tennyson and the maidens row out to sea,

And still as vaster grew the shore
And rolled the floods in grander space,
The maidens gathered strength and grace
And presence, lordlier than before.

And I myself, who sat apart
And watched them, waxed in every limb;
I felt the thews of Anakim,
The pulses of a Titan's heart;

They row "From deep to deep," until they see "A great ship
life her shining sides."

The man we loved was there on deck,
But thrice as large as man he bent
To greet us. Up the side I went,
And fell in silence on his neck.

The "I" of the poem -- accompanied by the maidens -- then
sails away with Hallam on the ghost ship:

And while the wind began to sweep
A music out of sheet and shroud,
We steered toward a crimson cloud
That landlike slept along the deep.

In another of Tennyson's poems, "Sea Dreams," a city
clerk's wife, again describing a strange dream, evokes the
power of water as an agent for change and purification:

-- But round the north, a light
A belt, it seemed, of luminous vapor lay,
And ever in it a low musical note
Swelled up and died; and, as it swelled, a ridge
Of breaker issued from the belt, and still
Grew with the growing note, and when the note
Had reached a thunderous fulness, on those cliffs
Broke, mixt with awful light (the same as that
Living within the belt) whereby she saw
That all those lines of cliffs were cliffs no more,
But huge cathedral fronts of every age,
Grave, florid, stern, as far as eye could see,
One after one; and then the great ridge drew,
Lessening to the music, back,
And past into the belt and swelled again



Slowly to music: ever when it broke
 The statues, king or saint, or founder fell:
 Then from the gaps and chasms of ruin left
 Came men and women in dark clusters round,
 Some crying, 'Set them up! They shall not fall!'
 And others, 'Let them lie for they have fallen.'
 And still they strove and wrangled: and she grieved
 In her strange dream, she knew not why, to find
 Their wildest wailings never out of tune
 With that sweet note; and ever as their shrieks
 Ran highest up the gamut, that great wave
 Returning, while none marked it, on the crowd
 Broke, mixt with awful light, and showed their eyes
 Glaring, and passionate looks, and swept away
 The men of flesh and blood, and men of stone,
 To the waste deeps together.

(ll. 202-231)

And it would seem almost gratuitous in this discussion of Tennyson's use of water as symbol to mention the dying Arthur's sea-journey to the island-valley of Avilion, and "Ulysses," as well as that most familiar of Tennyson's short lyrics, "Crossing the Bar."

Now, to The Lover's Tale. Julian is, through the agency of water, baptised into a new life; and, if we may make an inference from Tennyson's use of a story by Boccaccio, the new life is perhaps a life of social utility. This is not to suggest that Julian's experience is an easy one: it is agonizingly painful and, as we shall see in the lines quoted immediately below, the aged Julian can never forget the ecstatic days spent near the Lover's Bay, nor can his heart ignore the one clear call of the lost Camilla. On his return to Lover's Bay as an old man (old, perhaps like Byron's Childe Harold, in deeds but not in years), he asks his companions:



. . . Did I love her?
 Ye know that I did love her: to this present
 My full-orbed love has waned not.
 (I, 720-722)

And:

In that I live, I love; because I love
 I live: whate'er is fountain to the one
 Is fountain to the other; . . .
 (I, 173-175)

Indeed, Julian says he would have died but for Camilla's memory:

But from my farthest lapse, my latest ebb,
 Thine image like a charm of light and strength
 Upon the waters, pushed me back again
 On these deserted sands of barren life.
 (I, 186-189)

And:

So that, in that I have lived, do I live,
 And cannot die, and am, in having been --
 A portion of the pleasant yesterday,
 Thrust forward on today and out of place;
 A body journeying onward, sick with toil,
 The weight as if of age upon my limbs,
 The grasp of hopeless grief about my heart, . . .
 (I, 116-122)

Julian's lost youth beckons so strongly that even his firm but regretful renunciation at the end of the poem is clouded with a doubt: a doubt so strong that the whole theme of the poem possesses the same intriguing ambiguity that informs "The Palace of Art." (See my "Introduction" to this paper, and its summary of de L. Ryals' discussion of the lifelong interplay between the emotions of the "real" Tennyson and the "Victorian" Tennyson.)

As I pointed out earlier in this paper, Julian's baptism, his death-by-water, is foreshadowed by the discovery of the



drowned man washed upon the shore. I believe the connection between Julian and the drowned man will become quite explicit in this discussion of water as an agent of rebirth in the Tale.

Camilla's announcement -- in words that fell "Like water, drop by drop, upon my ear" (I, 565) -- that her true love is Lionel stuns Julian like a well-aimed poleaxe; he falls prostrate to the earth beside a stream and his mind begs for death or oblivion:

. . . Would I had lain
 Until the plaited ivy-trees had wound
 Round my worn limbs, and the wild brier had driven
 Its knotted thorns through my unpaining brows,
 Leaning its roses on my faded eyes,
 The wind had blown above me, and the
 Rain had fallen upon me, . . .
 (I, 606-612)

A few lines later comes an unmistakable reference to the drowned man from the "outer sea:"

At first the chillness of the sprinkled brook
 Smote on my brows, and then I seemed to hear
 Its murmur, as the drowning seaman hears,
 Who with his head below the surface dropt
 Listens the muffled booming indistinct
 Of the confused floods, and dimly knows
 His head shall rise no more; . . .
 (I, 622-627)

The "distressful rain" (I, 688) of Camilla's tears falls upon Julian's face; and even the blissful Lionel (who just happens to appear at this -- for Julian -- most mortifying time) "distilled/ Some drops of solace" (I, 702-703) from his happiness.

To Julian, "The dew [of Camilla's tears] is an unwholesome

dew,/ They will but sicken the sick plant the more." (I, 753-754) For Julian, in his agony of unrequited love, Camilla's tears now represent only death, not rebirth.

In Part II of the poem, Julian, in the best tradition of the love-crossed medieval Wild Man, takes to the woods where for many months he lives as a hermit. He wanders along the beach, and, in a highly evocative passage, he describes how he:

Insensibly . . . drew her name, until
The meaning of the letters shot into
My brain; anon the wanton billow washed
Them over till they faded like my love.
(II, 7-10)

Is there a hint of the redemptive power of water in those lines? Is the searing intensity of Julian's grief fading like the wave-washed letters in the sand? It might be so, for Julian can now return to his and Camilla's haunts:

. . . for the sound
Of the loud stream was pleasant, and the wind
Came wooingly with woodbine smells.
(II, 33-35)

When Julian is rejected by Camilla, the earth seems to split from "cope to base," (I, 593) but the stony, jagged fragments of agony

. . . all the fragments of the living rock
(Huge blocks, which some old trembling of the world
Had loosened from the mountain, till they fell
Half digging their own graves). . .
(II, 43-46)

have been "liveried . . . over" (II, 49) with moss by "the dashing runnel in the spring" (II, 48). And, although Julian



tears open his figurative wounds by clawing at the moss, the healing power of water has inexorably begun its work.

Yet, as in In Memoriam, the progress from despair is not an uninterrupted upward curve. In a kind of trance at the end of Part II, Julian envisions a room in the summer-house where hung a picture of a storm-tossed ship on the "waste and open sea. . . ." (II, 174) drawn by Camilla.

Suddenly

That painted vessel as with inner life,
 Began to heave upon that painted sea;
 An earthquake, my loud heart-beats made the ground
 Reel under us, and all at once, soul, life
 And breath and motion, past and flowed away
 To those unreal billows: round and round
 A whirlwind caught and bore us; mighty gyres
 Rapid and vast, of hissing spray wind-driven
 Far through the dizzy dark. Aloud she shrieked;
 My heart was cloven with pain; I wound my arms
 About her: we whirled giddily; the wind
 Sung, but I clasped her without fear; her weight
 Shrank in my grasp, and over my dim eyes,
 And parted lips which drank her breath, down-hung
 The jaws of Death: I, groaning, from me flung
 Her empty phantom: all the sway and whirl
 Of the storm dropt to windless calm, and I
 Down weltered through the dark ever and ever.

(II, 188-205)

This is death-in-life with a vengeance. Note that Julian "groaning, from me flung her empty phantom:" -- the vibrant, radiant Camilla is now a dry husk. Then Julian "Down welter[s] through the dark ever and ever." But he does not drown.

Later, as Julian sits in the entry of the "moaning cave" (surely another archetype of isolation) the "morning air, sweet after rain" consoles him, and the water from the "dripping woods" cools his "fevered brows." (III, 1-7)

In Part IV, there is little of water symbolism -- except for a rather Shelleyan description of Julian's journey through a waste land, "a dismal land,/ A flat malarian world of reed and marsh!" (IV, 140-141) In this final section of the poem -- which Tennyson published separately as The Golden Supper in 1869, a full ten years before the Tale was published in its entirety -- an unnamed Narrator takes over to finish Julian's story. The Narrator describes Julian's rescue of the supposedly-dead Camilla, the birth of Camilla's and Lionel's child, and Julian's restoration of Camilla and her babe to Lionel as the dramatic climax of a banquet given by Julian. After reuniting Camilla and Lionel, Julian leaves the banquet hall and the country of the Lover's Bay, and rides away with the Narrator:

He past forever from his native land;
And I with him, my Julian, back to mine.
(IV, 384-385)

Thus the poem ends, and although Tennyson has disposed of Julian, I do not think we can take leave of him at this point. He has, presumably, been reborn into a new life: the incubus of Camilla and self-absorbed isolation has been discarded. But what kind of new life has Julian found? Tennyson is not explicit on this point, but he has left us a clue. Ricks tells us in his introduction to the Tale (p. 300) that "A trial edition of 1869 (Lincoln) introduces it [The Lover's Tale] with: 'This poem, founded upon a story in Boccaccio, was begun in early youth, -- afterwards partly



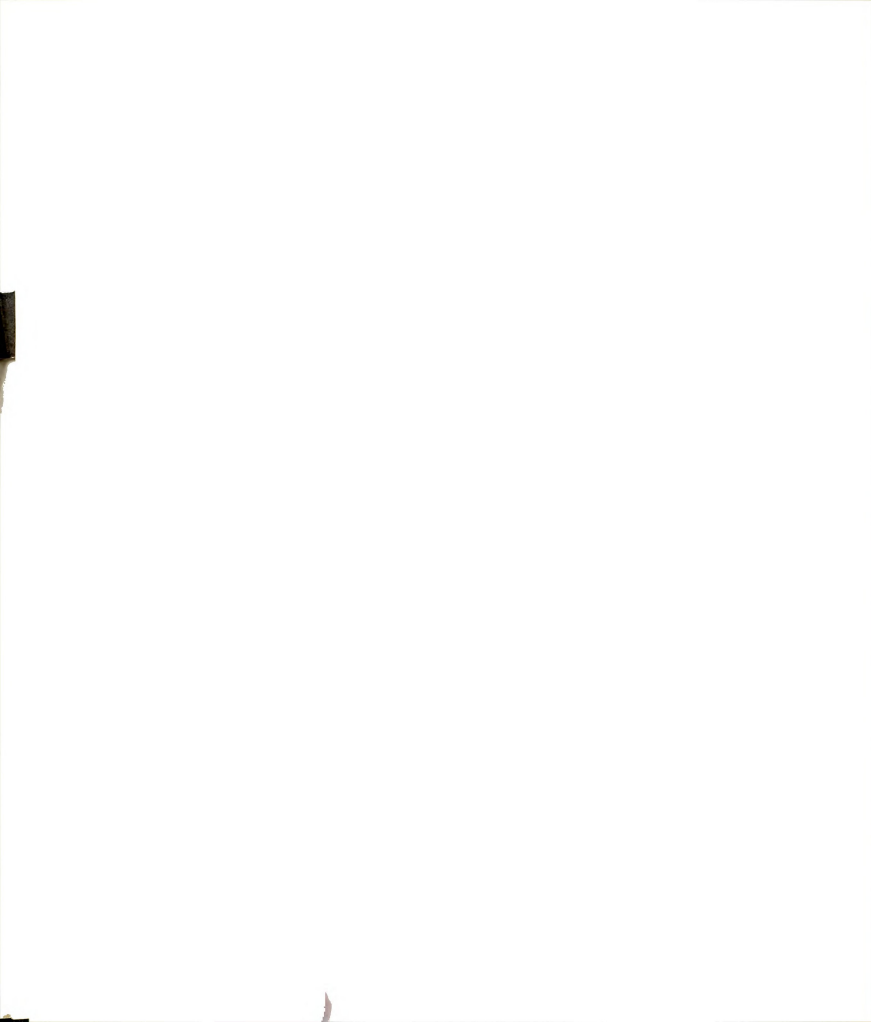
altered and revised -- and concluded in later years.'" Hence, an examination of the "story in Boccaccio," which Ricks concludes (pp. 300-301) is Decameron (10th Day, Fourth Tale), would seem appropriate. In Boccaccio's Tale, we are told of

. . . a young gentleman by the name of Gentile de' Carisendi, renowned both for his virtue and the nobility of his blood. He fell passionately in love with Catalina, a distinguished lady, the wife of a certain Nicoluccio Caccianimo, and as she did not requite his love, in sheer desperation he accepted the post of governor at Modona. . . and took his departure.¹⁵

So, in Boccaccio, Gentile, after being disappointed in love, assumes a post of social usefulness in Italy. May we not presume to infer (from Tennyson's use of Gentile's story as source material for Part IV) that Julian, likewise disappointed in love and after the desperate "death-by-water," through "a determined social dedication, . . . rose above the paralysis of private grief, the stone-stiff inactivity which was death itself"¹⁶ and eventually attained "the solemn assent to the cause of man"¹⁷ which was a goal of Tennyson and so many of his contemporaries?

Such an inference is, I suppose, tenable. But I believe further exploration of the imagery of the Tale and other poems may be fruitful in attempting to solve the ambiguity of the Tale's ending.

Julian's baptism is complete; one may speculate that he now is ready to take his place in the "real" world,



alongside his fellow man. For a time, he tarries in his homeland: "he would go,/ Would leave the land forever, and had gone/ Surely, but for a whisper, 'Go not yet,'/ Some warning -- sent divinely -- as it seemed" (IV, 18-21).

Soon comes to him the word of Camilla's Lady Ligeia-like "death," and Julian goes to the vault where she lies and discovers her heart still beating; she is duly revived and gives birth to a boy, "Heir to his face and land, to Lionel." (IV, 129)

Julian then rides away to a "hostel in a marsh ("A flat malarian land of reed and rush!" [IV, 141]) where he is found by the Narrator

. . . in a loft, with none to wait on him,
Found, as it seemed, a skeleton alone,
Raving of dead men's dust and beating hearts.
(IV, 137-139)

Eventually Julian recovers, and he and the Narrator ride to Julian's home, where Camilla and her babe are being cared for by Julian's mother. Lionel, it would seem, had been away when Camilla was revived and had no idea that she had been "resurrected" by Julian.

Julian plans a feast at which he will return Camilla to Lionel, as he has promised to do. Julian

. . . was all the more resolved to go,
And sent at once to Lionel, praying him
By that great love they both had borne the dead,
To come and revel for one hour with him
Before he left the land forevermore;
And then to friends -- they were not many -- who lived
Scatteringly about that lonely land of his,
And bad them to a banquet of farewells.
(IV, 178-185)

Julian prepares an elaborate feast, replete with "Heirlooms and ancient miracles of Art,/ Chalice and salver, wines that, Heaven knows when,/ Had sucked the fire of some forgotten sun," (IV, 191-193).

The banquet is Julian's first socially-oriented act during the whole of the Tale, it is a farewell meal of fellowship:

Well then -- our solemn feast -- we ate and drank,
And might -- the wines being of such nobleness --
Have jested also, but for Julian's eyes,
And something weird and wild about it all:
What was it? For our lover seldom spoke,
Scarce touched the meats; but ever and anon
A priceless goblet with a priceless wine
Arising, showed he drank beyond his use;
(IV, 220-227)

Finally, Julian restores the beautiful Camilla to Lionel, whom Lionel and the assembled guests first take as a spectre:

"Take my free gift, my cousin, for your wife;
And were it only for the giver's sake,
And though she seem so like the one you lost,
Yet cast her not away so suddenly,
Lest there be none left here to bring her back:
I leave this land forever."
(IV, 360-365)

One must note here that equations of Julian and Christ throughout the Tale are undeniable: When Camilla tells Julian of her love for Lionel "Then had the earth beneath me [Julian] yawning cloven/ With such a sound as when an iceberg splits/ From cope to base --" (I, 591-593) and at Jesus' crucifixion, St. Matthew tells us (27:51) "And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks

rent." There is the oblique reference to Christ's crown of thorns when, as we have seen, Julian in his passion begs that "the wild brier had driven/ Its knotted thorns through my unpaining brow," (I, 609-610). Further, there is Julian's agonized remark that Grief had taken the body of his past delight, "Narded and swathed and balmed it for herself,/ And laid it in a sepulchre of rock/ Never to rise again." (I, 671-673) All the Gospels agree that Jesus' body was anointed and swathed in fine linens by Joseph of Arimathea, then placed in a "sepulchre." And the use of the word "narded" is interesting here, for in St. Mark (14: 3-8) Jesus, aware of his coming crucifixion, is in Bethany at the house of Simon the Leper when "a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard (emphasis mine) very precious; and she brake the box and poured it on his head." Some of the guests remonstrated with the woman, but Jesus said: "Let her alone; why trouble ye her? she hath wrought a good work on me. . . . She hath done what she could; she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying."

Julian, like Jesus, has been baptised into a new life; he has "resurrected" Camilla from the narcoleptic trance into which she had fallen; and because of his and Camilla's consanguinity, he is, in a highly figurative sense, giving his "blood" to Lionel when he turns the young woman and her babe over to him.

One surely, in the Julian-Christ equations and in Julian's

feast, finds here echoes of the covenant-sacrifice of the Last Supper, and its derivative, the Holy Communion. The Communion is the symbol, the safeguard, and the means of Christian unity. Herewith is a part of one of the prayers for the rite of Holy Communion in The Book of Common Prayer:

Almighty and everliving God, we most heartily thank thee, . . . that we are very members incorporate in the mystical body of thy Son, which is the blessed company of all faithful people; and are also heirs through hope of thy everlasting kingdom, by the merits of his most precious death and passion. And we humbly beseech thee, O heavenly Father, so to assist us with thy grace, that we may continue in that holy fellowship, and do all such good works as thou has prepared for us to walk in; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with thee and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, world without end. Amen.¹⁸

It would seem that we can, if Julian's "solemn feast" is indeed an echo of the Holy Communion, say that Tennyson is strongly hinting that Julian, if not a Christ-like figure come to spread the "good news," is a member of the Christian community, realizes it, and rides off to "do all such good works as thou has prepared for us. . . ."

But hints do not satisfy; the ambiguity, one feels, is still troubling. Let us consider the question further in the next chapter.

FOOTNOTES

Water Symbolism, Redemption, and the Holy Communion in The Lover's Tale

¹ Buckley, The Victorian Temper (1951; rpt. New York: Vintage Books, n.d.). See especially Chapter V, "The Pattern of Conversion," pp. 87-108.

² Ibid., p. 104

³ "Tennyson's Garden of Art: A Study of The Hesperides," in Critical Essays on the Poetry of Tennyson, ed. John Killham (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1960), p. 104.

⁴ Ibid., p. 105.

⁵ Ibid., p. 99. I have begun, and will continue to make throughout this dissertation, a case for the fascination in the Tale of "inhuman isolation and retreat." Insofar as The Hesperides is concerned, the "Keen-eyed sisters" (l. 38) are adjured to guard the golden apple -- perhaps standing for an art that is withdrawn and introspective -- "Lest one from the East come and take it away." (l. 42) For "If the golden apple be taken/ The world will be overwise." (ll. 63-64) Other poems that demonstrate Tennyson's fascination with isolation and paradisiacal retreat are "The Lotos Eaters," "The Mystic," "The Lady of Shalott," and "The Palace of Art."

Indeed, how strong must have been the pull toward isolation after the death of Hallam in 1833! How tempting to withdraw into a

. . . lovely shell,
Small and pure as a pearl,
Lying close to my foot,
Frail but a work divine,
Made so fairly well
With delicate spire and whorl,
How exquisitely minute,
A miracle of design!

(Maud Part II, 2,1)

However, Tennyson resolutely tells us in In Memoriam (CVIII) that

I will not shut me from my kind,
 And, lest I stiffen into stone,
 I will not eat my heart alone,
 Nor feed with sighs a passing wind.

And Sir Charles Tennyson tells us in his biography of his grandfather that:

As the year went on, Alfred began slowly to recover from the shock. As usual, he found relief in creative work and study, and the programme which he drew up for himself at this time and which included history, chemistry, botany, electricity, animal physiology, mechanics and theology, showed his determination to grapple with the great philosophic and religious questions which were more and more absorbing his mind. He had much besides to occupy his mind. The care of his mother and sisters and the business of the household fell entirely on him. . . . (p. 149)

Further, says Sir Charles Tennyson, "All the year he had continued to work steadily at the revision of his published poems and he had composed many new ones. . . . It is remarkable that in this time of mental stress he had found power to express in verse his thoughts on the political storm through which the country has passed." (pp. 151-152)

⁶ Stange, p. 99-100.

⁷ Ibid., p. 110-111. Stange tells us in a note on p. 100 of his essay that The Hesperides was first reprinted by Hallam Tennyson (Memoir I, 61-65). In a headnote to the poem, Hallam Tennyson explains that The Hesperides was "Published and suppressed by my father, and republished by me here (with accents written by him), in consequence of a talk I had with him, in which he regretted that he had done away with it from his 'Juvenalia.'"

⁸ Buckley, Victorian Temper, pp. 91-92.

⁹ See footnote 1.

¹⁰ Buckley, Victorian Temper, pp. 99-100.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 100-101.

¹² Ibid., p. 105.

¹³ Ibid., p. 102-103.

- ¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 87-88.
- ¹⁵ Giovanni Boccaccio, The Decameron, trans. Frances Winwar (New York: The Modern Library, 1955) p. 594.
- ¹⁶ Buckley, Victorian Temper, p. 88.
- ¹⁷ Ibid., p. 105.
- ¹⁸ The Book of Common Prayer, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1952), p. 83.

CHAPTER IV

Ambiguities

Why, one may legitimately ask, does Tennyson leave us hanging? Why does he not say that Julian rides off to become a Carlylean Hero-poet and redeem the world? Why does he tease us with symbols of baptism and communion? He had been brought up by the Apostles at Trinity: "Tennyson's resolute dedication to his poetry, while it isolated him from the irresponsible raucous life of the typical undergraduate, assured him his place among the intense Apostles, likewise aloof from the 'Philistines' of 'Stumps' of the university."¹

Tennyson took terribly seriously the role of the poet in society. In "The Poet" and "The Poet's Mind," among other works, he "showed that he had adopted from Shelley and Wordsworth the view of the poet as a prophet charged with great responsibilities."² Indeed, he called Wordsworth "such a poet as kings should honour, and such an one as would do honour to kings; -- making the period of a reign famous by the uttering of memorable words concerning that period."
(Memoir, I, 338)

And he had this to say in 1869 (the year of the publication of The Golden Supper) about the growing "Art for Art's Sake" movement:

Art for Art's Sake(instead of Art for Art -- and Man's Sake)

Art for Art's sake! Hail, truest Lord of Hell!
 Hail Genius, Master of the Moral will!
 "The filthiest of all paintings painted well
 Is mightier than the purest painted ill!"
 Yes, mightier than the purest painted well,
 So prone are we toward the broad way to Hell.

On the same page (Memoir, II, 92) on which the above lines are quoted, Hallam says "These lines in a measure expressed his strong conviction, that the English were beginning to forget what was, in Voltaire's words, the glory of English literature -- 'No nation has treated in poetry moral ideas with more energy and depth than the English nation.'" Hallam also notes (Memoir, II, 92) that his father quoted George Sand: "L'art pour art est un vain mot: l'art pour le vrai, l'art pour le beau et le bon, voila la religion que je cherche." And in the struggle between "Love and Duty" there was no question as to which would win.

For love himself took part against himself
 To warn us off, and Duty loved of Love --
 O this world's curse -- beloved but hated -- came
 Like Death betwixt thy dear embrace and mine,
 And crying, "Who is this? behold thy bride,"
 She pushed me from thee.

(ll. 45-50)

So why the teasing ambiguity at the end of The Lover's Tale? The answer, I believe, is based on Tennyson's view of society and the deep fits of despondency that plagued him all his life. Of the Idylls, Tennyson said that there was "an allegorical or perhaps rather a parabolic drift in the poem." (Memoir, II, 127) Buckley says that in "each of the

ten Idylls within the frame, desire -- usually sexual desire -- determines the central action." He continues

Even in "The Holy Grail" [published in the 1869 volume with The Golden Supper], where the quest demands complete disinterest, none but Galahad is willing to lose himself that he may find himself; Lancelot cannot wholly renounce his sin; and Gawain is persuaded by a bevy of "merry maidens" in a silk pavilion that an erotic satisfaction is quite sufficient. Only in the tale of Gareth does desire fully accord with duty; by persisting in the tasks assigned to him, Gareth justifies his innocent and overt love of Lynette. Elsewhere reason contends, for the most part vainly, with physical passion. Merlin's yielding to the seductive wiles of Vivien is merely the grossest example of the abject surrender of the intellect to the flesh. . . . None of these characters [Lancelot, Balin, Pelleas, Tristram] practices or clearly recognizes the cardinal Tennysonian virtues of "self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control." Yet, the great argument of the Idylls as a whole is simply that, without such virtues and the faith that sanctions them, neither the individual or the state can attain rational order or spiritual health.³

"Camelot itself," Buckley continues, "cannot . . . survive the moral failure of its citizenry, for the true city lives essentially in the civic ideal that must day by day be reaffirmed. Thus, when forsaken by the seekers of the Grail, it disintegrates so rapidly that the few knights who return after a mispent year stumble upon 'only heaps of ruins, . . .'"⁴ The defeat of Arthur and the final collapse of the city-state is due to the individual defections of its members.

Morse Peckham says of the Idylls: "On the surface the Idylls entirely conforms with middle-class morality; that is its exoteric face. But beneath, esoterically, it is an utterly disillusioned demonstration, like the Ring, that



society cannot be redeemed, that its ills cannot be healed, that the transcendental hero violates those he presses into his service, and that the artist-hero must forever remain alienated."⁵

Tennyson makes the "parabolic drift" -- or allegorical significance -- of the Idylls abundantly clear in his "To the Queen," which the poet appended to the Idylls in 1873. He says that there are many Victorians who see signs of a coming storm; he warns against softness, cowardice, "Labour, with a groan and not a voice," and "Art, with poisonous honey stolen from France," among other things. Concluding, Victoria's Laureate says

. . . yet, - if our slowly-grown
And crowned Republic's crowning common-sense,
That saved her many times, not fail -- their fears
Are morning shadows huger than the shapes
That cast them not those gloomier which forego
The darkness of that battle in the West,
Where all of high and holy dies away.
(ll. 60-66)

Tennyson's view of the future must have been black indeed for him to attach those tactful but cautionary words to Victoria to the Idylls. And 1869 -- the year of The Golden Supper -- was also the year of the publication of "The Holy Grail," one of the darker of the Arthurian Tales. In the poem, Arthur tells his knights to leave Camelot, if they must, to look for the Holy Grail:

Go, since your vows are sacred, being made:
Yet, -- for ye know the cries of all my realm
Pass through this hall -- how often, O my knights
Your places being vacant at my side,

This chance of noble deeds will come and go
 Unchallenged, while ye follow wandering fires
 Lost in the quagmire! Many of you, yea most,
 Return no more:

(ll. 314-321)

Other poems in the 1869 volume include the enigmatic "The Higher Pantheism," "Flower in the Crannied Wall," "Northern Farmer (New Style)," "The Victim," "Wages," the grisly, nightmarish "Lucretius," and, besides "The Holy Grail," three other Idylls, "The Coming of Arthur," "The Passing of Arthur," and "Pelleas and Etarre."

Even in "The Coming of Arthur" there is a hint of the coming sin of Lancelot and Guinevere (the beginning of the breakdown of the Round Table) in the wonderfully ironic passage:

Then Arthur charged his warrior whom he loved
 And honored most, Sir Lancelot, to ride forth
 And bring the queen; -- and watched him from the gates:
 And Lancelot past away mong the flowers,
 (For then was latter April) and returned
 Among the flowers, in May, with Guinevere.
 To whom arrived, by Dubric the high saint,
 Chief of the church in Britain, and before
 The stateliest of her altar-shrines, the King
 That morn was married, while in stainless white
 The fair beginners of a nobler time,
 And glorying in their vows and him, his knights
 Stood round him, and rejoicing in his joy.
 Far shone the fields of May through open door,
 The sacred altar blossomed white with May,
 The Sun of May descended on their King,
 The gazed on all earth's beauty in their Queen,
 Rolled incense, and there past along the hymns
 A voice as of the waters, while the two
 Swore at the shrine of Christ a deathless love:
 And Arthur said, "Behold thy doom is mine.
 Let chance what will, I love thee to the death!"
 To whom the Queen replied with drooping eyes,
 "King and my lord, I love thee to the death!"

(ll. 446-469)

In the "Passing of Arthur," of course, the king and his few remaining knights are overthrown, and Bedivere pitifully asks the dying Arthur:

"Ah! my Lord Arthur, whither shall I go?
Where shall I hide my forehead and my eyes?
For now I see the true old times are dead,
When every morning brought a noble chance,
And every chance brought out a noble knight.
Such times have not been since the light that led
The holy Elders with the gift of myrrh.
But now the whole Round Table is dissolved
Which was an image of the mighty world,
And I, the last, go forth companionless,
And the days darken round me, and the years,
Among new men, strange faces, other minds."
(ll. 394-406)

Significantly, I believe, "The Passing of Arthur" also ends on an ambiguous note. One is given some encouragement that Arthur -- borne away on the barge by the mysterious three Queens -- may return. But one's mind is distinctly clouded with a doubt.

The grim "Pelleas and Etarre" is, I believe, somewhat significant to this study. For in "Pelleas," we find a hint of the same sort of solipsistic personality so clearly embodied in Julian.

Pelleas, at the beginning of the story, a sunny untroubled youth, comes to Carleon and King Arthur to enter a tournament: the prize, a golden circlet and a knightly sword. On the way he encounters a group of lost damsels, the most beautiful of which is the wicked Etarre. Pelleas, almost struck dumb, gazes at this stunning vision, and thinks:

"Is Guinevere herself so beautiful?"
 For large her violet eyes looked, and her bloom
 A rosy dawn kindled in stainless heavens,
 And round her limbs, mature in womanhood;
 And slender was her hand and small her shape;
 And but for those large eyes, the haunts of scorn,
 She might have seemed a toy to trifle with,
 And pass and care no more. But while he gazed
 The beauty of her flesh abashed the boy,
 As though it were the beauty of her soul:
 For as the base man, judging of the good,
 Put his own basis in him by default
 Of will and nature, so did Pelleas lend
All the young beauty of his own soul to hers,
 (ll. 66-74 Emphasis mine)

To make a long story relatively short, Pelleas wins the circlet for Etarre and the sword for himself. But the scornful Etarre will have none of the innocent youth, finding his callowness more than a little boring. But Pelleas follows her around like a well-trained spaniel. Eventually, Gawain -- for whom any pretty girl is fair game -- offers to help Pelleas out in his fruitless suit. Give me three days, says Gawain to Pelleas, and Etarre will be yours. On the third night, Pelleas grows suspicious, slips into Etarre's pavilion, and finds Gawain and Etarre asleep -- in one another's arms. Apparently, about all Etarre is wearing is the circlet Pelleas won for her in the tournament at Carleon. Pelleas

. . . groaning laid
 The naked sword athward their naked throats,
 There left it, and them sleeping; and she lay,
 The circlet of the tourney round her brows,
 And the sword of the tourney across her throat.
 (ll. 442-446)

From this point on, the tone and imagery of the poem grow increasingly more sinister. Pelleas rides away from Etarre's shrieking curses:

"O towers too strong,
 Huge, solid, would that even while I gaze
 The crack of earthquake shivering to your base
 Split you, and Hell burst up your harlot roofs,
 Bellowing, and charred you through and through within,
 Black as the harlot's heart -- hollow as a skull!
 Let the fierce east scream through your eyelet-holes,
 And whirl the dust of harlots round and round
 In dung and nettles! hiss, snake -- I saw him there --
 Let the fox bark, let the wolf yell. Who yells
 Here in the still sweet summer night, but I --
 I, the poor Pelleas who she called her fool?
 Fool, beast -- he, she, or I -- myself most fool;
 Beast too, as lacking human wit -- disgraced,
 Dishonoured all for trial of true love --
 Love? -- we be all alike: only the King
 Hath made us fools and liars. O noble vows!
 O great and sane and simple race of brutes
 That own no lust because they have no law!
 I loathe her, as I loved her to may shame.
 I never loved her, I but lusted for her --
 Away --"

(11. 454-476)

On his way back to Carleon, Pelleas encounters Percivale, who tells him of the love affair between Guinevere and Lancelot, and poor Pelleas' disillusion is complete. To make matters worse, he is unhorsed by Lancelot outside Carleon's gates. Pelleas and Lancelot enter Carleon castle together, where they find Guinevere with all her knights and dames.

. . . "have ye fought?"
 She asked of Lancelot. "Ay, my Queen-" he said.
 "And thou hast overthrown him?" "Ay, my Queen."
 Then she, turning to Pelleas, "O young knight,
 Hath the great heart of knighthood failed
 So far, thou canst not bide, unforwardly,
 A fall from him?" Then, for he answered not,
 "Or hast thou other griefs? If I, the Queen,
 May help them loose thy tongue, and let me know."
 But Pelleas lifted up an eye so fierce
 She quailed; and he, hissing, "I have no sword,"
 Sprang from the door into the dark. The Queen
 Looked hard upon her lover, he on her;
 And each foresaw the dolorous day to be:
 And all talk died, as in a grove all song
 Beneath the shadow of some bird of prey;

Then a long silence came upon the hall,
 And Modred thought, "The time is hard at hand."
 (ll. 580-597)

Tennyson had this to say of this poem: "In the Idyll of 'Pelleas and Etarre' selfishness has turned to open crime; it is 'the breaking of the storm. . . .'" (Memoir, II, 131) And Ricks (P. 1687) quotes Tennyson as calling "Pelleas and Etarre" "'Almost the saddest of the Idylls.'"

So The Golden Supper had some pretty gloomy company in the 1869 volume.

For Tennyson, frequently a less than sanguine soul, there was "one brief, brief shining moment that was known as Camelot" -- when say, a Carlylean Hero-poet who could change an intransigent society was possible. But if Tennyson felt his darker musings and fears for the future were correct, that "the battle in the West,/ Where all of high and holy dies away" was perhaps inevitable, he had no choice than to make the ending of the Tale ambiguous. For if the heroic Arthur could not stand against Modred and his hosts, how then could poor Julian?

FOOTNOTES

Ambiguities

¹ Buckley, Tennyson: The Growth of a Poet, p. 29.

² Charles Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson, p. 89.

³ Buckley, Tennyson: The Growth of a Poet, pp. 181-182.
If Arthur's knights are virtually all corrupt, a would-be hero-poet preaching the Tennysonian virtues of "self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control" would be a pathetic figure indeed!

⁴ Ibid., p. 186-187.

⁵ Morse Peckham, Beyond the Tragic Vision: The Quest for Identity in the Nineteenth Century (New York: George Braziller, 1962), p. 293.

CHAPTER V

Unrequited Love: The Rejection of Aggression

In his psychoanalytically-oriented study of the imagery of Tennyson's works, W. D. Paden gives us a clear insight into the latent thematic content of a number of the poet's early productions: "Masculine aggression in any physical mode [including, no doubt, masculine sexuality] not related to the divine ordinances he could imagine only as ending in failure; masculine competition for the favors of women he could only imagine as disastrous."¹

Paden, in support of his contention, cites "The Ballad of Oriana," in which the warrior-hero, aiming an arrow at a foeman, accidentally kills his love. The Freudian symbolism in the poem's imagery is explicit:

The bitter arrow went aside
 Oriana:
The false, false arrow went aside,
 Oriana:
The damned arrow glanced aside,
And pierced thy heart, my love, my bride,
 Oriana!

For, Paden writes, the "punishment [for sexuality] includes the death of the beloved."² Inevitably, for the youthful Tennyson, "the pursuit of love ends in failure; it generates an intolerable sense of guilt; it is punished by vast fears and fantasies that craze the mind."³

The shallow-hearted Amy of "Locksley Hall" undergoes a kind of symbolic death after the "masculine competition" for [her] favors between Tennyson's persona and the wealthy squire ends (as it inevitably must) unsuccessfully for the persona:

Yet it shall be: thou shalt lower to his level day by day,
What is fine within thee growing coarse to sympathise with
clay.

As the husband is, the wife is: thou art mated with a clown,
And the grossness of his nature will have weight to drag
thee down.

He will answer to the purpose, easy things to understand --
Better thou wert dead before me, though I slew thee with
my hand!

Better thou and I were lying, hidden from the heart's
disgrace,
Rolled in one another's arms, and silent in a last embrace.
(ll. 45-48; ll. 55-58)

Amy, who had come to be regarded as a sexual object by the tormented "I" of the poem, suffers a figurative, if not literal demise: "I remember one that perished: sweetly did she speak and move:/ Such a one do I remember, whom to look at was to love." (ll. 71-72)

However, the hero of "Locksley Hall" resolves (as does the protagonist of the later Maud) to find relief from his disastrous love affair in presumably useful social action:

Not in vain the distance beacons, Forward, forward let
us range
Let the great world spin forever down the ringing grooves
of change

Mother Age (for mine I knew not) help me as when life
begun:
Rift the hills, and roll the waters, flash the lightnings,
wiegh the sun.

Through the shadow of the globe we sweep into the younger
day:

Better fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay.

O I see the crescent promise of my spirit hath not set.
Ancient founts of inspiration well through all my fancy
yet.

(11. 181-188)

But the true paradigm for this infantile view of the man-woman relationship can be found in Maud (published in 1855). Here, after the duel in the "dreadful hollow" in which the lover kills Maud's brother, the lover goes quite literally insane and Maud (also quite literally) dies. The hero of Maud, overwhelmed by an "intolerable sense of guilt" to the point where incarceration is necessary, is tortured by the hideous fantasy that he is buried in an all-too-shallow grave:

Dead, long dead,
Long dead!
And my heart is a handful of dust,
And the wheels go over my head,
And my bones are shaken with pain,
For into a shallow grave they are thrust,
Only a yard beneath the street,
And the hoofs of the horses beat, beat,
The hoofs of the horses beat,
Beat into my scalp and brain,
With never an end to the stream of passing feet,
Driving, hurrying, marrying, burying,
Clamour and rumble, and ringing and clatter,
And here beneath it is all as bad,
For I thought the dead had peace, but it is not so;
To have no peace in the grave, is that not sad?

(Part II, 239-254)

But the ghost of Maud appears

. . . from a band of the blest
And spoke of a hope for the world in the coming wars --
'And in that hope dear heart, let trouble have rest,
Knowing I tarry for thee,' and pointed to Mars
As he glowed like a ruddy shield in the Lion's breast.

(Part III, 9-13)

The hero is thus redeemed from the dreadful "hysterical mock-disease" (Part III, 33) by "The blood-red blossom of war with a heart of fire." (Part III, 53). And, significantly, reunion with Maud is promised. Yet, is not escape into the "Blood-red blossom of war" -- even to "fight for the good" (Part III, 57) -- the most overt form of aggression? Yes; but the Crimean war was to borrow Paden's phrase, clearly "related to the divine ordinances," at least in the hero's mind: "I have felt with my native land, I am one with my kind,/ I embrace the purpose of God, and the doom assigned." (Part III, 58-59)

Tennyson himself said of Maud:

"This poem is a little Hamlet," the history of a morbid poetic soul, under the blighting influence of a recklessly speculative age. He is the heir of madness, an egotist with the makings of a cynic, raised to sanity by a pure and holy love which elevates his whole nature, passing from the height of triumph to the lowest depth of misery, driven to madness by the loss of her whom he has loved, and, when at length he has passed through the fiery furnace and has recovered reason, giving himself up to work for the good of mankind through the unselfishness born of his great passion.

(Memoir, I, 396)

And Paden sees the poem as a milestone on Tennyson's long road to emotional maturity:

The poem may be read as a statement of Tennyson's solution -- a partial solution -- of the imaginative difficulties of adolescence. It is perhaps unnecessary to note that these had long since ceased to be tyrannic. His courtship and happy marriage bear witness to the achievement of emotional maturity. His youthful troubles had lost immediacy, and he could see them in some perspective. But although a man can outgrow his youth, he cannot sever himself from it.⁴



The Lover's Tale might well serve as another template for the disastrous results of instinctual, aggressive drives. All of Paden's criteria are here: the inevitable failure of the pursuit of love; the sense of guilt accompanied by fears and fantasies; the "death" of the beloved. Further, there is an added complicating element, incest. For Julian and Camilla are, for all practical purposes, brother and sister, whose infancy

. . . was a very miracle
 Of fellow-feeling and communion.
 They tell me that we would not be alone, --
 And cried when we were parted; when I wept,
 Her smile lit up the rainbow of my tears,
 Stayed on the clouds of sorrow; that we loved
 The sound of one-another's voices more
 Than the gray cuckoo loves his name, and learned
 To lisp in tune together; that we slept
 In the same cradle always, face to face.
 Heart beating time to heart, lip pressing lip,
 Folding each other, breathing on each other,
 Dreaming together (dreaming of each other
 They should have added), till the morning light
 Sloped through the pines, upon the dewy pane
 Falling, unsealed our eyelids, and we woke
 To gaze upon each other.

(I, 244-260)

But Camilla -- "Dear name, which had too much of nearness in it" (I, 550) -- becomes considerably more than an object of brotherly affection to Julian. As we saw in the section of this paper dealing with Miltonic echoes, Julian's sexual awakening (with Camilla as its object) is metaphorically adumbrated by the blood-red coronal: "Hued with the scarlet of a fierce sunrise,/ Like to the wild youth of an evil prince, . . ." (I, 345-346) Julian's superego, of course,

represses the sexual element in his feeling for his foster-sister, but this element comes close to surfacing; for

Julian:

. . . in his agony conceives
A shameful sense as of a cleaving crime --
For whence without some guilt should such grief be?
(I, 781-783)

He adjures Camilla to "Deem that I love thee but as brothers do,/ So shalt thou love me still as sisters do;" (I, 755-756) But he adds, somewhat ambiguously:

Or if thou dream aught farther, dream but how
I could have loved thee, had there been naught else
To love as lovers, loved again by thee.
(I, 757-759)

After Julian's (inevitable) rejection by Camilla, he is immediately tortured by a series of horrifying fantasies: he experiences the sensations of drowning (I, 622-628); Lionel's sympathetic touch is like an "adder's fold" (I, 680), and most significantly, perhaps, Julian envisions himself lying on the forest floor:

Until the plaited ivy-trees had wound
Round my worn limbs, and the wild brier had driven
Its knotted thorns through my unpaining brows,
Leaning its roses on my faded eyes.
The wind had blown above me, and the rain
Had fallen upon me, and the gilded snake
Had nestled in this bosom-throne of love,
But I had been at rest for evermore.
(I, 606-614)

The cluster of images here is highly evocative: first, a Julian eventually half-buried by the accretions of nature -- a foreshadowing, perhaps, of the hallucinatory section in Maud where the hero fancies himself "buried" in a troubled,

shallow grave; second, the image of the crown of thorns -- suggesting Christ's suffering for man's primal sin, the loss of innocence; and finally, the now quiescent but unmistakably phallic "gilded snake," inextricably linked with Julian's incestuous love - a love that we have seen is essentially narcissistic.

Finally, Camilla "dies" -- although she is, of course, retrieved from her crypt and revived by Julian. But, if one follows Paden's logic, the sexual element in Julian's feelings for Camilla must have disappeared -- or been repressed to the utmost depths of his psyche -- for this "resurrection" to occur. (More likely, the resurrection reflects the long-delayed maturation of Tennyson himself, for by the time of the composition of The Golden Supper, England's Poet Laureate had been a happily married man for many years. There would now be no need for "the death of the beloved.")

An entry in Emily Tennyson's journal (Memoir, II, 50-51) for January 24, 1868, says that

Mr. Tennyson said to us it would not be easy to understand the allusions in "The Lover's Tale", unless we knew the story in Boccaccio from which it was taken; that it was the tale of a lover, whose mistress became the wife of another man. She fell ill, died apparently, and was buried. The old lover went to her tomb: on opening her coffin he found her heart beating: he took her home to his mother's house, where she gave birth to a child. Afterwards, the lover invited his friends and neighbors to a feast, among those the husband of the lady. In the middle of the feast the lover brought in a veiled figure, and asked the guests: "To whom would belong by right a dog, whose master turned him out to die, and

which was rescued and restored to life and health by another?" The unanimous opinion was given that "the man who saved the dog had a right to him." The lover unveiled the lady with her babe, and said to the husband, "I restore you your own." He then rode away and was seen no more.

Ricks notes (p. 300) that "A trial edition of 1869 (Lincoln) introduces The Lover's Tale with: 'This poem, founded upon a story in Boccaccio, was begun in early youth, -- afterwards partly altered and revised -- and concluded in later years.'" The Boccaccio story is unquestionably Tennyson's version of Decameron, 10th Day, 4th Tale; and it is interesting, if not thematically crucial, that there is apparently no mention of the Boccaccio story in connection with the Tale until 1868. (See Part ii of my Introduction and the Appendix.)

The Decameron tale from which the story of Camilla's rescue is derived reads in part as follows:

. . . Gentile . . . rode . . . until he came to the church where the lady was entombed. Pushing open the door of the vault, he went in quickly and lay down beside her, his face pressed close against hers. Again and again he kissed her, as tears streamed from his eyes. Now it is well known that men's desires, especially lovers', are not to be content with little, but will be ever seeking more, and though Gentile had inwardly decided not to remain there any longer, he pondered, "Come, now, why shouldn't I lay my hand upon her breast a little while since I am here? I'll never touch her sweet body again, as I've never laid a hand on it before."

Dominated by his appetite, he slipped his hand in her breast, when suddenly, after he had left it there a while, he felt a light flutter, as though the heart were still beating.⁵

Tennyson took great care to dilute these necrophiliac aspects:

"It is my wish," he [Julian] said, "to pass, to sleep,
 To rest, to be with her -- till the great day
 Pealed on us with that music which rights all,
 And raised us hand in hand." And kneeling there
 Down in the dreadful dust that once was man,
 Dust, as he said, that once was loving hearts,
 Hearts that had beat with such a love as mine --
 Not such as mine, no, nor for such as her --
 He softly put his arm about her neck
 And kissed her more than once, till helpless death
 And silence made him bold -- nay, but I wrong him,
 He revered his dear lady even in death;
 But placing his true hand upon her heart,
 "O, you warm heart," he moaned, "not even death
 Can chill you all at once:" then starting, thought
 His dreams had come again.

(IV, 62-77)

Let me hasten to add that overriding reasons doubtless contributed to Tennyson's toning down of Boccaccio's description of the scene within the crypt. This was, after all, the age of Mrs. Grundy, of Bowdler, of carefully-draped piano legs. For those reasons alone, Queen Victoria's Laureate could hardly have indulged himself in such a "naughty" description as Boccaccio's. And, as Paden points out, "although a man can outgrow his youth, he cannot sever himself from it." Thus Julian's ultimate rejection of sexual feeling (even in 1869) may be a faint echo of the young poet's obsession with the disastrous results of sexual aggression many years earlier.

Still, Tennyson, while never crude, was reasonably explicit about sex in 1868 and even much earlier. Indeed, a major theme in the Idylls -- if not the major theme -- is adultery. And in Merlin and Vivien (1856) the seduction of the ancient magician is put fairly baldly:

There lay she all her length and kissed his feet,
 As if in deepest reverence and in love.
 A twist of gold was round her hair; a robe
 Of samite without price, that more exprest
 Than hid her, clung about her lissome limbs,
 (ll. 217-221)

At last she let herself be conquered by him,
 And as the cageling newly flown returns,
 The seeming-injured simple-hearted thing
 Came to her old perch back, and settled there.
 (ll. 898-901)

And in Lucretius, (1868), the philosopher, dreaming under the
 influence of a love philtre, sees

The breasts of Helen, and hoveringly a sword
 Now over and now under, now direct,
 Pointed itself to pierce, but sank down shamed
 At all that beauty; . . .
 (ll. 161-164)

The mountain quickens into nymph and faun;
 And here an Oread -- how the sun delights
 To glance and shift about her slippery sides
 And rosy knees and supple roundedness,
 And budded bosom peaks --
 (ll. 187-191)

In Tiresias (1885) the seer tells the cause of his blindness:

There in a secret olive grove I saw
 Pallias Athene climbing from the bath
 In anger; yet one glittering foot disturbed
 The lucid well; one snowy knee was prest
 Against the margin flowers; a dreadful light
 Came from her golden hair, her golden helm
 And all her golden armour on the grass,
 And from her virgin breast, and virgin eyes
 Remaining fixt on mine, till mine grew dark
 For ever, and I heard a voice that said
 "Henceforth be blind, for thou hast seen too much
 And speak the truth that no man may believe."
 (ll. 38-49)

Even as early as the Oenone, 1832, there was no lack of nudity in the woods of many-fountained Ida, and Oenone says of Paris:

Ah me, my mountain shepherd, that my arms
 Were wound about thee, and my hot lips prest
 Close, close to thine in that quick-falling dew
 Of fruitful kisses, thick as autumn rains
 Flash in the pools of whirling Simois.
 (ll. 198-202)

However, the necrophiliac aspects of the Boccaccio story were a bit much for Tennyson, apparently. They needed muting. Leonard M. Findlay, writing in Victorian Poetry, gives a reasonable theory as to why Tennyson watered down Boccaccio. Part IV of the Tale, in which the "resurrection" story is found, was published in 1869, just three years after Swinburne had published his infamous Poems and Ballads, which caused such a stir among the English reading public. So, according to Findlay, "Tennyson took great care to tone down the necrophiliac aspect of his source. He had no wish to be thought sympathetic to aberrant practices even remotely similar to those described in [Poems and Ballads]." ⁶

Tennyson's early fears of sex -- and the fantasies of disaster that accompanied them -- perhaps stemmed from certain long-forgotten influences at Somersby rectory. But by the time of Maud (1855) -- and probably earlier -- these fears and fantasies surely were nearly, if not fully dissipated. There is certainly the implication at the conclusion of Maud that the hero and heroine will be reunited, whatever the

hero's "aggressions," even if their reunion must of necessity take place beyond the grave. And Tennyson could, to large extent, view the "I" of Maud with a certain clinical detachment, no longer hag-ridden by terrors sexual in origin.

Certainly by the late 1860's when Tennyson was concluding The Lover's Tale, his morbid preoccupations were gone. He could quietly tone down the necrophiliac aspects of his poem -- not because of any psychosexual pathology in his own makeup -- but simply because he wanted to dissociate himself from the shocking Mr. Swinburne. For Camilla is, after all, not really dead; and Julian, the brother who desired her, is responsible for her "resurrection." Of course, because of thematic necessity, Julian and Camilla could not be reunited; but Camilla is left apparently alive and well in Lover's Bay country. The morbid preoccupations with the "death of the beloved" seem to have disappeared. All this more than likely reflects the maturing and integration of Tennyson's personality through a happy marriage; he was by then no longer impelled by the bugaboos of his youth. (That he remembered his earlier attitudes is no doubt true; but they no longer held sway over him.) Doubtless here reflected was another phase in the resolution of the divided-self dilemma: the conflict between sex and abstinence implied in Paden's thesis was no longer operative.

Let us now move on to one of the most intriguing aspects

of The Lover's Tale: Tennyson's use of dream and trance material to further his theme.

FOOTNOTES

Unrequited Love: The Rejection of Aggression

¹ Tennyson in Egypt: A Study of the Imagery in His Earlier Works (Lawrence: University of Kansas Publications, 1942), p. 88.

² Ibid., p. 99.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., p. 92.

⁵ Giovanni Boccaccio, The Decameron, trans. Frances Winwar (New York: Modern Library, 1955), p. 594.

⁶ Leonard M. Findlay, "Swinburne and Tennyson," Victorian Poetry, 9, Nos. 1-2 (Spring-Summer, 1971), 223.

CHAPTER VI

The Dream Trance in The Lover's Tale

The dream as a literary device is a hoary one: Walter De La Mare's Behold, This Dreamer! (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1938), pp. 101-102, succinctly outlines the history of the dream as a favorite means of narrative advancement and thematic clarification:

But it was the "authour that hight Macrobes" who, with his prose commentary on the Dream of Scipio which he borrowed from Cicero, set a literary fashion in the fourth century which has never ceased to flower -- that of ascribing a story to a dream. From the limpid simplicity of The Pearl; from the workday directness of Piers Plowman, by way of The King's Quair, and The Golden Targe, so Spenser, and on to Byron, Burns and Tennyson, the tale in verse or allegory or lyric declaring itself to be a dream is so usual a device in English poetry that we question neither its motive nor its justification.

"Throughout his life," E. D. H. Johnson tells us, Tennyson was subject to trance-like fits of abstraction in which the veil of sensory appearances seemed to draw aside and the inner life of things to stand revealed. It was largely on the testimony of such fleeting intuitions that the poet based his faith in spiritual being as the ultimate reality."¹ Is it any wonder then that Tennyson's poems are filled with accounts of "trance-like fits of abstraction," weird seizures, dreams, and other less-than-conscious states that seemed to hold the key to "ultimate reality"?

But before we begin our discussion of the dream-trance in Tennyson's poetry, I believe it will be interesting to touch briefly upon some nineteenth-century views of the psychopathology of dreams -- for they anticipate startlingly Sigmund Freud's dream theories -- and see how they might apply to the dream-trance phenomena in Tennyson's work.

The philosophes of the eighteenth century had attempted to create a new society based on rational and mechanistic principles; but with the advent of Romanticism "reason was dethroned by the rediscovery of the irrational depths of the human psyche. Instinct and passion became the focal points of interest; Weltschmerz and withdrawal . . . into private life expressed the new spirit of the times."²

Along with this interest in the individual as individual -- what M. H. Abrams has called the "expressive" orientation in art³ -- came a corresponding interest in the workings (and aberrations) of the individual psyche. "Etienne Georget (1795-1828) . . . appeared [in 1820] to understand that certain unacceptable ideas are not brought to consciousness and are therefore repressed, but he did not elaborate this profound concept."⁴ It remained for J. Moreau de Tours (1804-1884) to point out that dreams offer:

. . . the real clue for the understanding of disturbed mental functions. Dreams, he said, are made of the same stuff as hallucinations and thus provide a connecting link between the healthy person and the insane; dreaming is the transient psychopathology of the normal person. Moreau did not use the expression "unconscious" but came

close to this concept when he wrote of two modes of existence: "It appears then that there are two modes of existence. The first one results from our communication with the universe. The second one is but the reflection of the self and is fed from its own distinct internal sources. The dream is a kind of in-between land where the external life ends and the internal life begins."⁵

Other pre-Freudian dream theorists -- among them Johann Christian Heinroth, who will be quoted later -- had a profound intuitive grasp of the inner conflicts that manifest themselves in dreams. But now to our main task, an examination of some of the dream-trance material in Tennyson's canon, particularly The Lover's Tale.

Charles Tennyson, in an article entitled "The Dream in Tennyson's Poetry,"⁶ discusses "the use of the dream as a source of image, simile, and metaphor, and even as a vital element in the poetic structure [of Tennyson's work]."⁷ He adds that Tennyson "had at least some knowledge of dream literature. But I believe that most of the references in his poetry stem from the study of his own dreams and the conclusions which he himself drew from them."⁸ Charles Tennyson takes issue with E. D. H. Johnson's argument⁹ that Tennyson used the dream as a kind of "cryptographic subterfuge to which he was driven by the impossibility of establishing communication with an unsympathetic and materialistic age," dismissing Johnson's notion as not "an adequate or plausible theory, for such a procedure would be quite out of keeping with Tennyson's naive and straightforward character."¹⁰

I believe Charles Tennyson is correct here in one estimate, wrong in another. The notion that Tennyson used dreams as cryptograms (i.e., in E. D. H. Johnson's sense) does not seem to me tenable as a generalization. Tennyson frequently uses dreams and dream-material symbolically -- as a kind of shorthand to achieve thematic intent; he does not use such material cryptographically to any substantial degree -- that is, to hide his deepest thoughts from an unsympathetic audience. Indeed, Tennyson uses the dream quite straightforwardly in exploring various psychological states. In Lucretius, to cite one example, he explores what happens when the dream censor breaks down, and the mind is filled with unacceptable images. Lucretius cannot tolerate the prurient visions that bubble up from his unconscious, and he kills himself. Here Tennyson, in the 1860's, has come close to a modern psychological truism: that dreams help us preserve our sanity by providing an outlet for our unacceptable thoughts -- in an acceptably disguised form, of course.

Which brings me to my next point. Charles Tennyson speaks of his grandfather as "naive" -- but surely he cannot mean psychologically naive. My analysis of The Lover's Tale has shown that Tennyson was anything but ingenuous when it came to a grasp of the human psyche. And Tennyson's Maud is considered by Roy P. Basler to show that the poet "was remarkably familiar with the phenomena of nonrational as well as rational mental behavior, and that as an artist he undertook

to use them realistically in developing his theme."¹¹ Comparing Tennyson to Browning, Basler says: "The truth is that Tennyson reveals in Maud a penetration of the very depths of being which Browning habitually skimmed, but seldom plumbed, with his well-worn, neo-Platonic axioms of the soul."¹²

The poet's grandson explains Tennyson's use of the dream or trance as based upon "Tennyson's lifelong preoccupation with Neoplatonic ideas about the contrast between the ideal (spiritual) and the phenomenal (material). Tennyson seems quite early in life to have come to believe that the material universe has no independent reality, but is only a shadow, probably a distorted one, of a spiritual reality which transcends time, place and sensual perception."¹³

Charles Tennyson quotes (p. 243) from a poem of his grandfather's on the illusoriness of time:

In time there is no present
In eternity no future
In eternity no past. . . .

Another early and ambiguous poem ("All Thoughts, All Creeds") follows on p. 246:

i

All thoughts, all creeds, all dreams are true,
All visions wild and strange;
Man is the measure of all truth
Unto himself. All truth is change.
All men do walk in sleep, and all
Have faith in that they dream:
For all things are as they seem to all,
And all things flow like a stream.



ii

There is no rest, no calm, no pause,
 Nor good, nor ill, nor light, nor shade,
 Nor essence, nor eternal laws:
 For nothing is, but all is made.
 But if I dream that all these are,
 They are to me for that I dream;
 For all things are as they seem to all,
 And all things flow like a stream.

In all, Sir Charles Tennyson says there are some 500 references to dreams and trances in Tennyson's canon.¹⁴ He describes in some detail the dreams and trances in In Memoriam stressing particularly sections LXIX, LXXI, XCV, and CIII and further points out that only one of the Idylls -- "Gareth and Lynette" -- does not contain some reference to dream and trance. Among other poems containing trances or dream sequences he lists Maud, "A Dream of Fair Women," Lucretius, "Aylmer's Field," "Sea Dreams" "The Ancient Sage," "Armageddon," Enoch Arden, "Columbus," "Maeldune," "The Sisters," "Demeter and Persephone," "The Death of Oenone," The Princess -- and many others including, of course, The Lover's Tale.¹⁵

Interestingly enough, he also points out that his grandfather linked the dream with telepathy and clairvoyance.¹⁶ But always, for Tennyson, there was the belief that "the material world is only a shadow of ('imitates') the spiritual world, which is God the infinite and infinitely loving."¹⁷

Now to the Tale itself. Whatever Tennyson's source, a remarkable dream-passage in the poem gives us vividly Moreau's notion of the dream as "a kind of in-between land where the external life ends and the internal life begins":

Always the inaudible invisible thought,
 Artificer and subject, lord and slave,
 Shaped by the audible and the visible,
 Moulded the audible and visible;
 All crisped sounds of wave and leaf and wind,
 Flattered the fancy of my fading brain;
 The cloud-pavilioned element, the wood,
 The mountain, the three cypresses, the cave,
 Storm, sunset, glows and glories of the moon
 Below black firs, when silent-creeping winds
 Laid the long night in silver streaks and bars,
 Were wrought into the tissue of my dream:
 The moanings in the forest, the loud brook,
 Cries of the partridge like a rusty key
 Turned in a lock, owl-whoop and dorhawk-whirr
 Awoke me not, but were a part of sleep,
 And voices in the distance calling to me
 And in my vision bidding me dream on,
 Like sounds without the twilight realm of dreams,
 Which wander round the bases of the hills,
 And murmur at the low-dropt eaves of sleep,
 Half-entering the portals. Oftentimes
 The vision and fair prelude, in the end
 Opening on darkness, stately vestibules
 To caves and shows of Death: whether the mind
 With some revenge -- even to itself unknown, --
 Made strange division of its suffering
 With her, whom to have suffering viewed had been
 Extremest pain; or that the clear-eyed Spirit,
 Being blunted in the Present, grew at length
 Prophetic and prescient of whate'er
 The Future had in store; or that which most
 Enchains belief, the sorrow of my spirit
 Was of so wide a compass it took in
 All I had loved, and my dull agony,
 Ideally to her transferred, became
 Anguish intolerable.

(II, 101-137)

One wonders if Tennyson had read de Tours, or Georget.
 For in the lines above he displays a keen awareness of the
 dream as product of external stimuli and internal conflict.
 Nor is it beyond the realm of possibility that Tennyson was
 aware of another predecessor of Freud, Johann Christian
 Heinroth (1773-1843), who had profound intuitive grasp of
 inner conflict; steeped in Lutheran tradition, he:

. . . held that the ultimate cause of mental disturbance is sin He expressed in religious-moralistic terminology the central concept of modern psychiatry, that of inner conflict. If Heinroth would have used the current expression "sense of guilt" for sin, he would have been more readily recognized as a forerunner of psychoanalysis. As it is, there is a general tendency to discard him as a religious healer. When Heinroth defined mental illness as the result of sin he did not mean that all neurotics and psychotics perpetrated sinful acts. He referred to sins of thought that offend our moral sense. Stated in modern terms, the source of mental disturbance is the conflict between unacceptable impulses (the id) and the conscience (the superego).¹⁸

In the passage from The Tale quoted above, the source of Julian's mental disturbance -- the "Anguish intolerable" -- may be the product of unacceptable sexual impulses on Julian's part coming in conflict with the superego, or conscience. Of course, he protests the idealization of his love:

. . . the sorrow of my spirit
Was of so wide a compass it took in
All I had loved, and my dull agony,
Ideally to her transferred, **became**
Anguish intolerable.

But Julian's submerged sexual instincts (with his foster-sister Camilla as their object) are nigh to surfacing, and the conflict between the id and the superego produce "extremest pain."

Freud tells us that

Dreams fall into three classes according to their attitude toward wish-fulfillment. The first class consists of those which represent an unrepressed wish undisguisedly; these are the dreams of an infantile type which become even rarer in adults.

Secondly, there are the dreams which express a repressed wish disguisedly; these no doubt form the overwhelming majority of all our dreams, and require analysis before they can be understood. In the third place, there are the dreams which represent a repressed wish, but do so with insufficient or no disguise. These last dreams are invariably accompanied by anxiety, which interrupts them. . . . There is no great difficulty in proving that the ideational content which produces anxiety was once a wish but has since undergone repression.¹⁹

Julian's dream trances seem to partake of elements of all three of these dream types. A strongly solipsistic character is an infantile character, and while Julian's ambivalent wishes are somewhat disguised, it is a rather transparent disguise.²⁰ The censor is not a very rigid one, and there seems to be a good deal of anxiety accompanying these dreams. So, it would seem, we have a mixture in each of Julian's dreams of all three of Freud's types.

Let us examine the dreams in the Tale in their narrative order. First, there is the dream of Camilla dead:

. . . then I seemed
 To rise, and through the forest shadow borne
 With more than mortal swiftness, I ran down
 The steepy sea-bank, till I came upon
 The rear of a procession, curving round
 The silver-sheeted bay: in front of which
 Six stately virgins, all in white, upbore,
 A broad earth-sweeping pall of whitest lawn,
 Wreathed round the bier with garlands: in the distance
 From out the yellow woods upon the hill
 Looked forth the summit and the pinnacles
 Of a gray steeple -- thence at intervals
 A low bell tolling.

(II, 70-82)

If dreams are, in Freud's words, disguised wish-fulfillments, we have quite clearly here pointed up the ambivalence of Julian's wishes. On the one hand, Julian cannot consciously

wish Camilla dead; on the other hand, we have the autumnal woods and the bell in the gray church steeple tolling ominously, and all

. . . save those six virgins which upheld their bier,
 Were stoled from head to foot in flowing black;
 One walked abreast with me, and veiled his brow,
 And he was loud in weeping and in praise
 Of her, we followed: a strong sympathy
 Shook all my soul: I flung myself upon him
 In tears and cries: I told him all my love,
 How I had loved her from the first; whereat
 He shrank and howled, and from his brow drew back
 His hand to push me from him; and the face,
 The very face and form of Lionel
 Flashed through my eyes into my innermost brain,
 And at his feet I seemed to faint and fall,
 To fall and die away.

(II, 82-96)

There are a number of images in the above passage that bear examination. First we have the virgins and the pall, then the tolling of the church bell and the black-gowned procession of mourners, all symbols of death; next we have the howling Lionel; and finally we have Julian falling at Lionel's feet to "die away." So: Julian deeply loves Camilla and cannot consciously wish her death; but his love violates the oldest taboo known to mankind, incest -- so she must "die" or be removed somehow; Lionel -- the instrument of Julian's separation from Camilla must be punished too -- in this case by his overwhelming grief for his "dead" wife; and Julian, because of his sexual feelings for his foster-sister must be punished also -- by a figurative death, if not a literal one. So he falls and seems to "die away."²¹

In the next dream sequence -- and this passage possesses

a nightmarish, hallucinatory quality that the others do not -- Julian and Camilla are together (in Julian's fancy) in the summerhouse where they played as innocent children. Horrifyingly, a picture of a ship that Camilla has painted and which hangs upon the summer house wall,

Began to heave upon that painted sea;
An earthquake, my loud heart beats, made the ground
Reel under us,

(II, 189-191)

Then:

. . . Aloud she shrieked;
My heart was cloven with pain; I wound my arms
About her: we whirled giddily; the wind
Sung; but I clasped her without fear: her weight
Shrank in my grasp, and over my dim eyes,
And parted lips which drank her breath, down-hung
The jaws of Death: I groaning, from me flung
Her empty phantom: all the sway and whirl
Of the storm dropt to windless calm, and I
Down weltered through the dark ever and ever.

(II, 196-205)

This is a highly crucial dream-trance passage: it contains a brilliantly compressed group of images which seem to summarize Julian's conversion experience. Dreams of drowning, modern psychologists tell us, may represent "an incestuous desire to return to the mother's womb"²² -- in Julian's case, the desire to remain in the "womb" of the Lover's Bay. On the other hand, such dreams may refer to "the uterine waters, and so to birth, as in mythical stories of heroes like Moses, who were born out of water or out of the sea, and in the saying of Christ to Nicodemus [John, iii, 4,6] that we must be born of water (that is, physical, uterine birth) as well as spiritual rebirth."²³

The symbolism of the passage is fraught with ambivalence. There is Julian's wish to cling to the solipsistic world of the uterine waters, to welter down "through the dark ever and ever." But in opposition is the wish to break free, to be reborn in an almost physical sense. Julian casts aside Camilla's "empty phantom," and when we see him next he is seated at the entrance of the cave, (surely a womb symbol) breathing "A morning air, sweet after rain." (III, 3) The third dream follows almost immediately, taking Julian away from the cave's mouth.

The third dream, I believe, indicates that Julian -- having passed through the death-in-life of redemption -- is more reconciled to the marriage of Camilla and Lionel, and importantly, more reconciled to his own regeneration. Obviously, the ambivalence of feeling is still there: Julian is losing something very precious to him. But there is a decided difference in tone and imagery between the first dream and the last:

. . . those six maids
 With shrieks and ringing laughter on the sands
 Threw down the bier; the woods upon the hill
 Waved with a sudden gust that sweeping down
 Took the edges of the pall, and blew it far
 Until it hung, a little silver cloud
 Over the sounding seas: I turned: my heart
 Shrank in me, like a snowflake in the hand,
 Waiting to see the settled countenance
 Of her I loved, adorned with fading flowers.
 But she from her bier, as into fresher life,
 My sister, my cousin, and my love,
 Leapt lightly clad in bridal white -- her hair
 Studded with one rich Provence rose -- a light
 Of smiling welcome round her lips -- her eyes

And cheeks as bright as when she climbed the hill.
 One hand she reached to those who came behind,
 And while I mused nor yet endured to take
 So rich a prize, the man who stood with me
 Stept gaily forward, throwing down his robes,
 And claspt her hand in his: again the bells
 Jangled and clanged: again the stormy surf
 Crashed in the shingle: and the whirling rout
 Led by those two rushed into dance, and fled
 Wind-footed to the steeple in the woods,
 Till they were swallowed in the leafy bowers,
 And I stood sole beside the vacant bier.

(III, 31-58)

Here the imagery is of vibrant life for the most part: the maids, Bacchanals now, toss down the bier; the fresh wind whips the pall into the sky where it hangs like a silver cloud; Camilla, rose-like, emerges from the bier like a butterfly from a chrysalis and she and Lionel rush into dance, leading the rout toward the church in the woods. Of course, Julian is left standing forlornly beside the vacant bier; and soon he rushes away from "Those marriage bells, echoing in ear and heart --" (IV, 3). Julian appears inconsolable (he could hardly seem otherwise), but the vibrant imagery of life in this sequence may in a sense parallel the point which Julian has reached in his development. For, just as Camilla has emerged from the coffin, so Julian has been reborn again; he has not "Down weltered through the dark ever and ever." Julian may not have chosen life, but he has been given it; the pathological, deadly tie with Camilla has almost been severed. With the breaking of the incestuous relationship, the fatal "oneness," both Julian and Camilla have achieved a selfhood which they did not have before, and

Julian is almost ready for the "golden supper," that

. . . golden hour -- of triumph shall I say?
Solace at least -- before he left his home.
(IV, 6-7)

Tennyson has handled the dream material in The Lover's Tale in a masterful manner. In a remarkable passage he has described how external stimuli impinge upon and help determine dream content; and he has vividly portrayed the inner conflict of his protagonist, particularly in the drowning dream. And, so important from a dramatic point of view, his dream visions of the funeral and marriage processions carefully and skillfully - almost too skillfully - foreshadow Julian's "resurrection" of Camilla from her family crypt and her reunion with Lionel. And, it is interesting to note that, since Tennyson linked the dream with clairvoyance and telepathy, that Julian is summoned to the supposedly dead Camilla's rescue by a mysterious "whisper." (IV, 43)

Charles Tennyson concludes in his article that as "with advancing years his [the poet's] interest in the supra-sensory world broadened and deepened, the voice of that world should in his poetry more and more, and with evergrowing conviction, find expression through trance and dream."²⁴ However, Charles Tennyson states that his grandfather never makes "the dream a neat and deliberate dramatic device," and with this statement I must to some degree take issue. Admittedly, dreams came to the poet, as they do to us all, in an "inartificial and spontaneous"²⁵ way; but the artist in Tennyson was quite

capable of using these psychic manifestations neatly and deliberately to suit his own thematic ends. In Maud, to cite just one example, the heroine appears from the "band of the blest" at just the right moment to help the psychotic protagonist channel his twisted and solipsistic psychic energies into social action, even of a dubious sort.

And I believe I have clearly demonstrated that Tennyson did use dream and trance material in The Lover's Tale most cleverly and self-consciously in a number of different ways, all related to the poem's theme. The dream as a foreshadowing device is readily apparent; Julian's ambivalent feelings about his own solipsistic nature are clearly shown in each of the trance sequences; but most important of all, each of the three sequences -- with the second as climax -- reveal stages in Julian's progress through the regenerative process, much as the Christmas sections in In Memoriam represent way-stations along that "way of the soul."

FOOTNOTES

The Dream Trance in The Lover's Tale

¹ The Alien Vision of Victorian Poetry (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), p. 3.

² Franz G. Alexander, M.D., and Sheldon T. Selesnick, M.D., The History of Psychiatry (New York: Mentor Books, 1968), p. 176.

³ The Mirror and the Lamp (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953) See especially Chapters I and IV.

⁴ The History of Psychiatry, p. 182.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 183-184.

⁶ The Virginia Quarterly Review, XL, No. 2, (Spring, 1964) 228-248.

⁷ Ibid., p. 228.

⁸ Ibid., p. 240.

⁹ See the chapter titled "Tennyson" (p. 3-68) in The Alien Vision.

¹⁰ "The Dream in Tennyson's Poetry," p. 228.

¹¹ Sex, Symbolism, and Psychology in Literature (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1948), p. 75.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ "The Dream in Tennyson's Poetry," p. 241.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 228.

¹⁵ These are only some of the dream-trance poems mentioned throughout Charles Tennyson's article.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 247.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 245.

- 18 The History of Psychiatry, p. 185.
- 19 Sigmund Freud, On Dreams, trans. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton, 1952), pp. 90-91.
- 20 Given Tennyson's audience, this transparency would have been a necessity.
- 21 See the preceeding chapter of this paper, "The Rejection of Aggression."
- 22 J. A. Hadfield, Dreams and Nightmares (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1954), p. 164.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 "The Dream in Tennyson's Poetry," p. 248.
- 25 Ibid.

Chapter VII

Conclusion

The Lover's Tale then, represents a kind of "way of the soul," and as such it is fair to compare it with that other soul's pathway, In Memoriam -- a poem of much vaster philosophical scope. In Memoriam mirrors Tennyson's psychic climb from the pit of utter despair (in which, incidentally, the function of poetry is at first entirely self-serving: a "sad mechanic exercise,/ Like dull narcotics numbing pain" (V) to a final affirmation of that eternal process which moves inexorably in the "Epilogue" to the poem to that joyful "one far-off divine event" of all-encompassing Love. During the course of the poem, the "I" of In Memoriam rejects his original stultifying, self-defeating concept of art and announces:

I will not shut me from my kind,
And lest I stiffen into stone,
I will not eat my heart alone,
Nor feed with sighs a passing wind:
(CVII)

He will work with a conscience and an aim to grapple with the great Victorian imponderables -- even attempting to frame for his fellow man the mystical experience, the underpinning of his faith, in "matter-molded forms of speech." (XCV)

This may be the central theme of The Lover's Tale, a narrative which surely concerns itself with the role of the

artist. The implications are strong that it is. But there are certainly other implications that suggest the thwarting of the public poet. As we have seen, other poems written about the time of the composition of the Tale's conclusion bear out the melancholy suggestion that Julian's final ride may be a passage into oblivion.

Both In Memoriam and The Lover's Tale are quest-poems: yet for all the doubts, hopes, fears, for all the backing and filling -- for all the downright agnosticism in the poem -- the journey in In Memoriam is fairly clear. And a goal, however vague, is finally reached. The poem, as has often been remarked, is quintessentially Victorian. The Tale, on the other hand, plagues us with its devilish ambiguity.

Walter Houghton tells us that a basic difference between the early- and mid-Victorians and the moderns is that these Victorians believed that answers, however elusive, were ultimately attainable. Carlyle puts it this way: "Man has walked by the light of conflagrations, and amid the sound of falling cities; and now there is darkness, and long watching till it be morning. The voice even of the faithful can but exclaim: 'As yet struggles the twelfth hour of the Night: birds of the darkness are on the wing, spectres uproar, the dead walk, the living dream. -- Thou, Eternal Providence, wilt cause the day to dawn!'"¹

"'Thou, Eternal Providence, wilt cause the day to dawn!'"
It is a promise. "The Victorians might be, and often were,

uncertain about what theory to accept or what faculty of the mind to rely on; but it never occurred to them to doubt their capacity to arrive at truth,"² Houghton states. Contrasting the Victorian and the modern periods, Houghton says: "And yet, if both periods can be called ages of doubt, it is certainly with a difference. Neither the kind of doubt nor the strength of its hold was the same as it is today. In the four decades under inspection [1830-1870], doubt never reached the point of positive or terminal skepticism."³

But around 1870, "a number of things converged to suggest the relativity of knowledge and the subjective character of thought. This radical change, bounding the mid-Victorian temper, is documented in the popular work of Walter Pater."⁴ In the opening paragraphs of his essay on Coleridge (1866) Pater writes:

Modern thought is distinguished from ancient by its cultivation of the 'relative' spirit in place of the 'absolute.' Ancient philosophy sought to arrest every object in an eternal outline, to fix thought in a necessary formula, and the varieties of life in a classification by 'kinds' or genera. To the modern spirit nothing is or can be rightly known, except relatively and under conditions. . . . The faculty for truth is recognized as a power of distinguishing and fixing delicate and fugitive detail. The moral world is ever in contact with the physical, and the relative spirit has invaded moral philosophy from the ground of the inductive sciences. There it has started a new analysis of the relations of body and mind, good and evil, freedom and necessity. Hard and abstract moralities are yielding to a more exact estimate of the subtlety and complexity of our life.⁵

Of this new "relativism" of the 1860's and 1870's, "nothing could be less Victorian,"⁶ Houghton says -- or,

presumably, more modern. Now, could this new relativism -- this reduction of knowledge to a series of "impressions unstable, flickering, inconsistent,"⁷ this denial of "Hard and abstract moralities" -- could this relativism have been the stimulus of Tennyson's warning in "To the Queen"⁸ against "careless looseners of the faith" and "That which knows not, ruling that which knows/ To its own harm"?

Further, could this relativism underlie the plurisignation of the conclusion of The Lover's Tale? In a world of an overwhelming "positive or terminal skepticism," how could there be a place for a Victorian hero-poet -- what need for a "clear deep-seeing eye"⁹ when there was nothing to be seen but variously reflecting surfaces and loose, shifting bits of colored glass?

If, indeed, Pater's relativism -- or the fear of it -- does permeate the ending of The Lover's Tale, it provides the poem with a modernity which alone entitles the Tale to a more prominent place in the Tennyson canon. If, despite its surface callowness, the poem can be construed as a sophisticated poet's reaction to the shift from faith in the existence of ultimate truths -- what Houghton calls "the one intellectual certitude in Victorian England"¹⁰ to that modern viewpoint which regards "all things and principles of things as inconsistent modes or fashions,"¹¹ then, the poem has something to offer today's reader.

Further, the poem's psychological complexity commends

it to us. In the light of Tennyson's demonstrated understanding of the development of the human psyche, its gradual growth from infantile self-absorption to maturity, and his keen grasp of dream psychology (however attained), the poem must be regarded as more than a homesick Cambridge undergraduate's lament for his family and the fens and wolds of Lincolnshire.¹²

One errs if one regards the Tale as a bit of juvenalia confined to the poet's Cambridge years, a kind of happy hunting ground for echoes of Byron and Shelley. It is far more: begun, apparently, in the late 1820's and not published in its final form until 1879, it is the work of Tennyson's mature as well as youthful years, and as such it gives us insight into the poet's youthful views and the thoughts and feelings of a much older man.

From the first are apparent the poet's sharp psychological insights: he saw the solipsistic trap into which Shelley had fallen, and he early resolved to avoid it, however tempting the bait. (Implicit here is the poet's understanding of the dilemma of the divided self: he felt [as he was always to feel] the twin pulls of withdrawal and commitment, but Julian's growth from narcissism to a willingness to make his home in the real world must in a very real sense parallel the poet's own development.) Further, Tennyson had, as Edgar Johnson says, "a knowledge of dream psychology unique in the period,"¹³ and he put it to generally excellent use in the thematic development of the Tale.

All this, of course, is subsumed in the masterful command of poetic device -- image, symbol, and allusion. Tennyson takes Milton for his own; and from the Miltonic Eden he recreates a kind of anti-Eden: a lotos-land flowing with the milk and honey of withdrawal and aesthetic death; he is influenced by Shelley, as we saw, but at the same time he is not influenced by him; using the symbolism of baptism, he rescues his hero from the narcissistic snare that had brought the Alastor hero to an "untimely grave," and prepares him for a life of social use. In the splendid "Last Supper" scene with all its connotations, Tennyson uses Biblical symbolism to begin to prepare us for the Tale's final ambiguity: is Julian going to a cross or to life?

Throughout the entire poem are reminders of themes and motifs that sound through so much of Tennyson's work: withdrawal and commitment, with all those words imply of attitude toward art and life; madness, or near it; dream and trance; and, especially, unrequited love.

A few quibbles must be raised: some of the foreshadowings (i.e., the "empty bier") are a bit contrived; the Good Samaritan story in Section IV is tediously long; the introduction of a narrator to tell the last segment of the story is just another attempt by Tennyson to dissociate himself from the protagonist, who, in 1869, must have seemed a bit hysterical and un-Victorian in tone. Tennyson had, of course, gotten some sharp drumfire from the critics of Maud in the

1850's, many of whom persisted in associating Tennyson himself with the psychotic "I" of the poem. And Tennyson was never one for hostile criticism; he lacked the Swinburnian relish for a good literary dogfight.

Additionally, the reader is not prepared for the appearance of Lionel, who plays such an important role in the story; if, indeed, Julian and Camilla had spent their young lives "alone, together on these hills," when did Lionel get a chance to court our dark-eyed maiden? But whatever one might say about Lionel's popping up unannounced, the ways in which Tennyson uses him -- first as devil, then as avenging angel, then as bereaved husband -- is a real tour de force.

But to point out the few minor flaws in this poem is mere carping. The Lover's Tale has been too long neglected and should have a firmer place in the Tennyson corpus. That old literary buccaneer, Richard Herne Shepherd -- whose piracies finally drove Tennyson to publish the poem -- knew a good thing when he saw one.¹⁴

FOOTNOTES

Conclusion

¹ From "Characteristics." In English Prose of the Victorian Era, eds. C. F. Harrold and W. D. Templeman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1938), p. 21.

² Walter E. Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), p. 14.

³ Ibid., p. 13.

⁴ Ibid., p. 14.

⁵ English Prose of the Victorian Era, p. 1,438. (Pater's relativism, of course, underlay the so-called "impressionistic" criticism, where the critic -- rather than essaying objectively "to see the object as in itself it really is" -- seeks rather to communicate what he sees and feels in the presence of a work of art.)

⁶ Houghton, p. 15.

⁷ Pater's "Conclusion" to The Renaissance. In English Prose of the Victorian Era, p. 1,409. The "Conclusion" was first written in 1868 (Houghton, p. 16), the same year that Tennyson was writing Parts III and IV of The Lover's Tale.

⁸ Appended to the Idylls in the 1873 edition of Tennyson's poems.

⁹ Carlyle, On Heroes and Hero-Worship, p. 108.

¹⁰ Houghton, p. 14.

¹¹ Pater's "Conclusion." In English Prose of the Victorian Era, p. 1,408.

¹² In Tennyson: The Growth of a Poet, p. 23, Buckley speculates that Julian's "confession [in The Lover's Tale] of an overpowering love for his foster-sister . . . could be construed as a reflection of the poet's own acute dependence upon his family and his regard for the bonds of consanguinity as protection against alien forces of neglect and misjudgment" at Cambridge.

¹³ E. D. H. Johnson, The Alien Vision of Victorian Poetry,
p. 23.

¹⁴ For an account of Shepherd's piracies of the Tale,
see the "Appendix" to this paper.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX

The piracy of The Lover's Tale by Richard Herne Shepherd -- which apparently spurred Tennyson to publish the poem in 1879, a half-century after a substantial part of the poem was first written -- has been carefully explored by W. H. Paden in his "Tennyson's The Lover's Tale, R. H. Shepherd and T. J. Wise."¹ In this appendix, I shall lean heavily upon Professor Paden's article, as well as drawing from Hallam Tennyson's Memoir and Sir Charles Tennyson's biography of his grandfather.

The headnote to an early, fragmentary version of the poem (British Museum copy) says that:

The Poem of the Lover's Tale (the lover is supposed to be himself a poet,) was written in my nineteenth year, and consequently contains nearly as many faults as words. That I deemed it not wholly unoriginal is my only apology for its publication -- an apology, lame and poor, and somewhat impertinent to boot; so that if its infirmities meet with more laughter than charity in the world, I shall not raise my voice in its defence. I am aware how deficient the Poem is in point of Art, and it is not without considerable misgivings that I have ventured to publish even this fragment of it. 'Enough' says the old proverb, 'is as good as a feast.'

(Ricks, p. 300)

At any rate, Charles Tennyson tells us that during the latter part of 1832 his grandfather and Arthur Hallam were in continual correspondence about the volume of poems Tennyson had decided to publish at the end of the year; "Tennyson," says his grandson, "had originally intended to include The

Lover's Tale, and two-thirds [of course, in its final version the poem has four parts] of this long blank verse poem [Parts I and II] were already in print (covering some sixty pages) when he decided to withdraw it. It was in vain that his friends protested."²

Ricks (p. 300) quotes Tennyson as saying that Parts I, II, and III of the Tale were written in his "nineteenth year." Paden says of this early third section: "of this continuation nothing seems to be known. The present third and fourth parts were written about 1868." Paden continues:

It is significant that in 1832 Tennyson was unable to complete the tale. The unknown third part he then wrote probably ended when the lover descended into the tomb to seek his beloved. This was the beginning of Boccaccio's story; it was the end of young Tennyson's. To it Tennyson was strongly attracted; beyond it he had not then the ability to proceed. In his middle age he completed a cognate tale, in Enoch Arden (1864) -- cognate, that is, to Boccaccio's novella; the differences are significant.³

And T. J. Wise, in his A Bibliography of the Writings of Alfred, Lord Tennyson, 2 volumes (London: Printed for Private Circulation, 1908), says in I, 58, that the Part III extant today was "contemporaneous in composition with 'The Golden supper,' Boccaccio's story which Constitutes Part IV of the Complete work."⁴

For "Tennyson himself described 'The Lover's Tale,' presumably as a whole, as based upon a story in Boccaccio. (Memoir, II, 50) Most scholars have accepted this statement uncritically. Evidently when Tennyson was considering

publishing the poem in 1868, he wished to stress the importance of Boccaccio, perhaps to give the poem the guise of impersonality."⁵ Certainly only Parts III and IV bear any relation to the Boccaccio "resurrection story" in Decameron Tenth Day, Fourth Story.

Now, back to the pressures upon Tennyson to publish the fragment of the Tale in his 1832 volume. Charles Tennyson quotes a letter from Arthur Hallam in which Hallam attempted to dissuade his friend from his position: "By all that is dear to thee -- by our friendship -- by sun moon and stars -- by narwhals and seahorses -- don't give up 'the Lover's Tale.' Heath is mad to hear of your intention. I am madder. You must be point-blank mad. It will please a vast number of people. It pleases the wise. You are free from all responsibility as to its faults by the few lines of preface. Pray -- pray -- pray -- change your mind again. I have ordered Moxon to stop proceeding until I hear from you again. . . ."⁶

But, Tennyson held to his resolve not to include The Lover's Tale in the volume of Poems to be published in December, 1832. He wrote his publisher, Moxon: "After mature consideration I have come to a resolution of not publishing the last poem in my little volume, entitled 'Lover's Tale;' it is too full of faults and though I think it might conduce to making me popular, yet to my eye, it spoils the completeness of the book, and is better away; of course, whatever expenses may have been incurred in printing the above must devolve on me solely."⁷

Now let us turn to Professor Paden's article and to the fate of at least one of the few copies of Parts I and II of the Tale, then subtitled A Fragment, and dated 1833, which had been run off by Moxon.

Paden refers to a letter (quoted by T. J. Wise in his Bibliography of Tennyson) written by Arthur Hallam in 1833 to the effect that, after his decision to withhold The Lover's Tale from inclusion in the Poems, Tennyson had six copies of the poem printed and asked Arthur Hallam to distribute these among their college friends; Paden believes the letter (otherwise unknown) quoted by Wise probably to be genuine, and Paden further states that Moxon, "who was generous with his authors, sent several additional copies to the poet at Somersby."⁹

Paden states that Tennyson, "considerably later than 1833," presented copies of the fragment to two friends, John Forster and William Ewart Gladstone.¹⁰ Now the copy presented to Forster is of particular interest to this study; it was this copy that according to Ricks, indirectly was to spur Tennyson -- somewhat unwillingly by his own admission -- eventually to publish in full The Lover's Tale.

According to Paden, Forster gave his copy to Robert Browning, who lent it to one Thomas Powell, who "probably sold it before the time in 1849 when he fled from the accumulating consequences of his dishonesty to New York. . . ." and on June 16, 1870, the copy was sold in London by Sotheby's to



Basil Montague Pickering, a publisher and bookseller.¹¹

Paden states that this "was the first time the Tale had emerged from the seclusion of private ownership; before then its existence had only been vaguely known."¹²

Pickering's purchase of the Tale at Sotheby's called forth this note in the July 2, 870, Athenaeum: "A LOST CHANCE -- A copy of the rarest of Mr. Tennyson's works, The Lover's Tale, written when he was eighteen years old and published, with a half-apologizing Preface in 1833, was sold a fortnight ago at Sotheby's in one volume with the Laureate's scarce Poems, Chiefly Lyrical, 1830, and Poems, 1833, and fetched £4 12s. The Lover's Tale is not in the British Museum, and the authorities let Mr. B. M. Pickering buy it away from them doubtless for the author of Tennysoniana, which contains no notice of the poem."¹³

"No scholar," Paden concludes, "will have much doubt as to the source of the squib; it came in all probability from the author of Tennysoniana, Richard Herne Shepherd, himself."¹⁴

Now begins the story of the "merciless piracies"¹⁵ which led Tennyson to publish The Lover's Tale in its final form in 1879.

According to Paden, Wise in his bibliography alleges that Richard Herne Shepherd "caused to be printed and distributed, in 1870 and 1875, no less than six separate piratical editions of The Lover's Tale"¹⁶ -- although court records

quoted Paden indicate the pirated reprints commissioned and distributed by Shepherd numbered only two.

There may have been other, later, piracies of the Tale besides Shepherd's -- or so one might infer from Hallam Tennyson's statement (Memoir, II, p. 240): "In May [1879] my father published in a revised form a poem written when he was seventeen, 'The Lover's Tale.' The publication was forced on him, as it was being extensively pirated. He had already in 1875 suppressed an edition brought out by Mr. Herne Shepherd. . . ." But Ricks (p. 300) does not equivocate when he says that Tennyson's publication of the poem was "finally spurred by R. H. Shepherd's piracy. . . ." and Paden makes no mention of other piracies.

It is interesting to note that in Emily Tennyson's journal of January 18, 1868 -- quoted in Memoir, II, 50 -- the poet already was anticipating unauthorized publication of the Tale and was apologetic still about the quality of the work: "He [Tennyson] talked of publishing 'The Lover's Tale' because someone was sure to publish it some day. I urged this. We heard that written copies were being circulated. He said: 'Allowance must be made for the redundance of youth. I cannot pick it to pieces and make it up again. It is rich and full, but there are mistakes in it.' For instance, he pointed out one in the passage beginning 'Even as the all-enduring camel, etc.' 'There could not have been a crimson colouring in the middle of the moonlight night.

The poem is the breath of young love.'"

At any rate, on July 28, 1875, the Laureate filed suit in Chancery to halt Shepherd's piracies of the Tale,¹⁷ which, as we shall see, had begun some five years earlier. The Bill of Complaint submitted by Tennyson's solicitors accused Shepherd of obtaining [in 1870] a copy of the Tale from B. M. Pickering (the Sotheby's purchaser) "in a surreptitious manner;" the complaint further alleged that Shepherd "without Mr. Pickering's knowledge or sanction took a copy of the said Poem and caused it to be reprinted. On discovering what the Defendant had done, Mr. Pickering remonstrated with him and called upon him to give up all the copies of said Poem in his possession. The Defendant pretended to comply with the demand but it appears that he kept back one or more copies. . . ."18

The poet's solicitors also demanded to know, among other things, who Shepherd's printers were, how many copies of the Tale had been printed, and what had become of them.¹⁹

In his Answer, Shepherd denied that he had obtained the poem from Pickering surreptitiously; indeed, the defendant contended, he copied the poem on Pickering's premises and at Pickering's request, and, further, Pickering had on occasion loaned the Tale to Shepherd so that Shepherd might make corrections in his copy. Shepherd admitted to reprinting some 54 or 55 copies of the Tale in August, 1870, but said that all these -- with the exception of "certain copies that

had been given away" -- had been returned to Pickering after the latter had requested them "in or about the month of October, 1870."²⁰

According to court records, all but 11 copies of this first reprints were retrieved and destroyed.²¹

However, Shepherd, by his own admission, retained "a rough proof" of the Tale,²² and in the spring of 1875 he issued a second reprint of the poem with an accompanying monograph which was advertised in The Athenaeum and The Academy, among other publications.²³ Here is the advertisement from The Athenaeum of April 24, 1875: "SUPPRESSED POEM by Alfred Tennyson. -- A printed copy of 'THE LOVER'S TALE', a blank verse Poem of nearly fifty pages written by THE POET LAUREATE in his nineteenth year, and withdrawn from publication, is FOR SALE. -- Apply, by letter only, to W. C. Clifford, Auctioneer and Estate Agent, 18, Lower Belgrave-street, Eaton-Square, S.W."²⁴

It was this second reprint by Shepherd that triggered Tennyson's lawsuit, which came to trial on January 29, 1876.²⁵ Paden's transcription of the court records give us the result:

This court doth order that a perpetual Injunction be awarded to restrain the defendant Richard Herne Shepherd, his Agents and Servants, from printing, publishing, selling or otherwise disposing of any copy or copies of the Poem. . . . 'The Lover's Tale' And it is Ordered that the defendant Richard Herne Shepherd deliver up on oath to the Plaintiff Alfred Tennyson . . . all Copies of the said Poems in the possession or power of the defendant. And it is ordered that the defendant Richard Herne Shepherd do pay to the plaintiff Alfred Tennyson

his costs of this suit as between Solicitor and Client, to be taxed by the Taxing Master in case the parties differ.²⁶

Shepherd was ordered to pay approximately £100,²⁷ but the Laureate assumed the solicitors' costs himself "since he heard Mr. Shepherd was very poor and that his aged mother depended on him for her livelihood."²⁸

The court records quoted by Paden show Shepherd to have deposed that: "Subsequently [to 1870] and once only, and in the spring of this year [1875], I caused the said poem [The Lover's Tale] to be reprinted. This last mentioned reprint was from [a] rough proof of 1870 retained by me. . . . This reprint was executed by Messrs. Ogden and Co., St. John's Street, Clerkenwell, who at my order delivered 100 copies and for which I paid them £7 4s."²⁹

Shepherd included in the record a list of various book-sellers and individuals who had received copies of this second reprint, noting that 55 copies remained in his possession. "I deny," Shepherd said, "that any ready sale has been found for such copies among rare or curious books or otherwise. Indeed, the contrary is the fact as is shown by the few copies . . . I succeeded in, even after issuing advertisements as aforesaid, disposing of

"I admit that in the matters aforesaid I have acted most improperly. . . . The copies of the reprint now in my possession I am ready and willing and hereby offer to deliver up to the plaintiff."³⁰

As we have noted, The Lover's Tale was published in full by Tennyson in May, 1879. (Part IV, The Golden Supper, had been published in 1869.) In the 1879 headnote to The Lover's Tale, Tennyson wrote:

The original Preface to The Lover's Tale states that it was composed in my nineteenth year. Only two of the three parts then written were printed, when, feeling the imperfections of the poem, I withdrew it from the press. One of my friends, however, who, boylike admired the boy's work, distributed among our common associates of that hour some copies of these two parts, without my knowledge, without the omissions and amendments which I had in contemplation, and marred by the many misprints of the compositor. Seeing that these two parts have of late been mercilessly pirated, and that what I had deemed scarce worthy to live is not allowed to die, may I not be pardoned if I suffer the whole poem at last to come to light -- (accompanied with a reprint of the sequel -- a work of my mature life -- The Golden Supper? (Ricks, p. 299)

FOOTNOTES

Appendix

- ¹ Studies in Bibliography, XVIII (1965), 111-145.
- ² Charles Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson, p. 129.
- ³ Paden, Tennyson in Egypt, p. 160.
- ⁴ Clarice Short, "Tennyson and 'The Lover's Tale,'" p. 79.
- ⁵ Ibid., p. 78.
- ⁶ Alfred Tennyson, p. 129.
- ⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸ Ricks, p. 299.
- ⁹ Paden, "Tennyson's The Lover's Tale, . . . ," p. 111.
- ¹⁰ Ibid., p. 113.
- ¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ See Tennyson's Preface to The Lover's Tale, quoted in this Appendix, p. 148.
- ¹⁶ Paden, "Tennyson's The Lover's Tale, . . . ," p. 111.
- ¹⁷ Ibid., p. 122.
- ¹⁸ Ibid., p. 114.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 114-115.
- ²⁰ Ibid., pp. 115-116.
- ²¹ Ibid., p. 117.



- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Ibid., pp. 119-120.
- 24 Ibid., p. 120.
- 25 Ibid., p. 123.
- 26 Ibid., p. 124.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Ibid. (See Memoir, II, 240.)
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 Ibid., p. 126.

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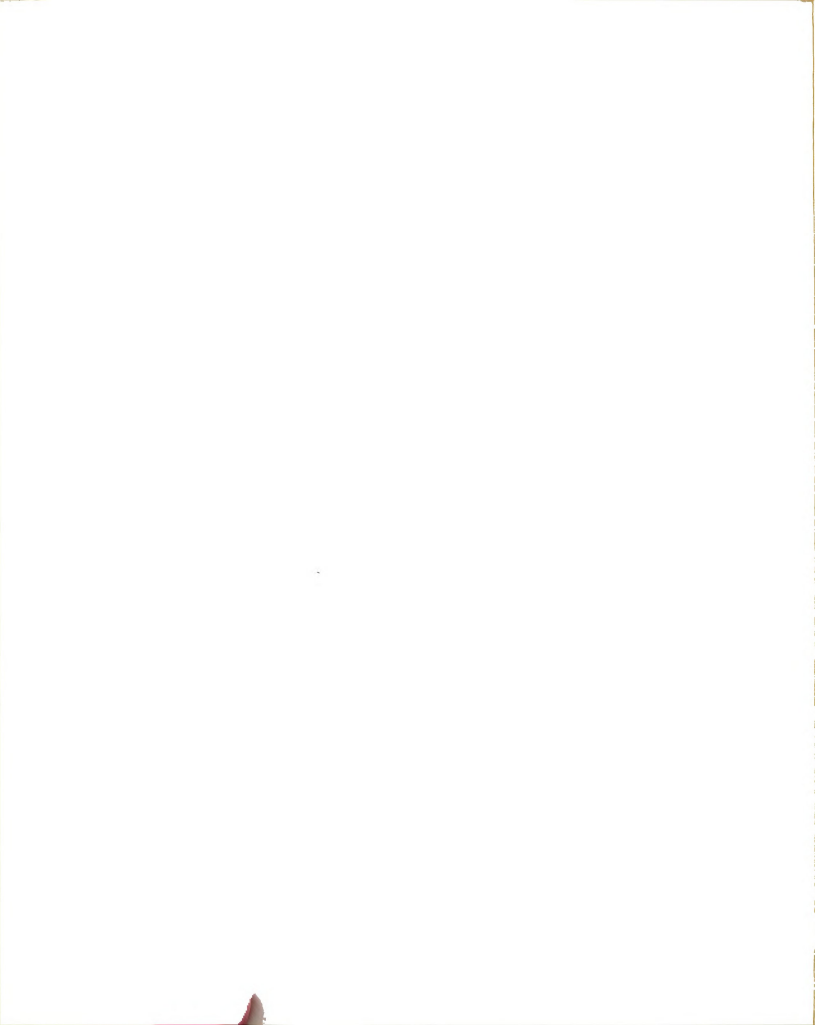
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