

THE ONCE AND FUTURE FRIEND: TENNYSON'S EXPLORATION OF
HUMAN IMMORTALITY

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DEDICATION

To Bonnie Chandler who, like Tennyson, notices the details,
and to my parents, who taught me that order is beautiful.

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ABSTRACT

Tennyson's grief at the passing of Arthur Hallam merged with an early fascination with the mythic King Arthur of the Britons and became a quest for knowledge about the effects of physical death on spiritual identity. Just as the Britons believed King Arthur would return from Avalon, Tennyson longed to believe that his friend awaited him in some afterlife. Fearing that human souls disappeared into an all-inclusive Great Soul once death erased their physical identity, Tennyson searched for some clue that human individuality, or personality, survived its encounter with the Eternal. He wrote three major poems about an Arthurian death, "Morte d'Arthur," In Memoriam, and "The Passing of Arthur", inscribing each with a pattern of images juxtaposing individual objects with larger, encompassing entities. At times in this pattern individuality survives contact with larger forces, and at others it blends into a sort of cosmic mass. Within the layered significance of his word pictures, Tennyson places the parallel characters of King Arthur and Arthur Hallam, who share not only a name but also the role of test case for humanity. Both symbolize the human soul confronting its fate, around which the poet arranges the image patterns that record his evolving conviction that individuality transcends the destruction of its physical expression.

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"Nothing worthy proving can be proven," Tennyson told his son (Hallam I, 311).¹ Although he numbered the immortality of the human soul among the "Eternal Truths," the poet believed this conviction must rest on faith, not proof, because of the mind's finite nature (Hallam I, 311). But Tennyson, with his strong and active mind, could not rely on blindly accepted religious tenets. Faith, for him, resembled knowing. He forged his conviction in a long struggle to obtain a first-hand perception of the truth, doubting human immortality until he encountered it through his own experience, in a way that satisfied his own intelligence.

What concerned Tennyson most was not so much the existence of souls after death as their nature, once separated from the body's physical expression of identity. More than an intellectual exercise, his exploration of human eternity was a labor of love. It involved a happy memory from a rather dark childhood, and the most heart-rending experience of his young manhood, perhaps of his life. Reading Thomas Malory as a boy, Tennyson saw the "vision of an ideal Arthur" shining up at him from the text, kindling a lifelong fascination with the mythic king who would become for him "the greatest of all poetical subjects" (Ricks 671, 669). As a young man at Cambridge, he met Arthur Henry Hallam, a fellow student who would become the impetus behind his attempt to understand immortality. Four years of genuine intellectual and spiritual companionship with Hallam warmed Tennyson's frequently bleak existence. Then a brain hemorrhage killed Hallam during an 1833 visit to Vienna, leaving his friend in loneliness made doubly painful by its contrast to the brilliant, sympathetic personality it replaced (Ricks xxvi).

From the time of Hallam's death, Tennyson's two Arthurs began to resemble one another. His poetry exhibits the parallel themes and questions revolving around the two

¹Citations from Hallam Tennyson's biography of his father will be referred to as "Hallam" to avoid confusion with Tennyson himself.

figures as Tennyson confronted the enormous uncertainty left in him by Hallam's death. While King Arthur came to stand for "the Ideal Soul of Man," Hallam's soul became the centerpiece of an inquiry into the fate of human personality (Ricks 671). Just as the Britons believed that Arthur escaped death and would return from Avalon to help them, Tennyson needed to believe that Hallam retained his individual identity in spite of physical death and that he waited somewhere for reunion with his friend.

The link between the Arthurs emerges in the earliest versions of Tennyson's first two Arthur poems. The initial draft of "Morte d'Arthur" appears in a notebook between two lines of a poem that eventually formed part of In Memoriam (Hallam I, 109). Tennyson began work on this first significant Arthurian piece shortly after learning of Hallam's death in the autumn of 1833 (Ricks 148). In 1850, he published In Memoriam, an elegy to Hallam that comprised more than 100 lyrics written during the almost twenty years since his friend's death. Nine years later, he published the first four sections of Idylls of the King, the Arthurian epic that began with Malory in childhood and first took shape in the "Morte d'Arthur" he wrote in the early days of his grief. In 1869, he published a volume containing "The Passing of Arthur," the final idyll, although he kept polishing and revising his Arthuriad for the rest of his life (Hallam II, 129).

Through all three poems, "Morte d'Arthur," In Memoriam, and "The Passing of Arthur," an "ideal Arthur" exemplifies the qualities of the human soul while other characters strive to learn his nature and discern his fate. Tennyson's personal revelation about the place of human souls in the cosmic order, described by a vision and a dream in In Memoriam, enables the metamorphosis of the "Morte d'Arthur" into "The Passing of Arthur," the final section of Idylls of the King. Where Arthur represented an ideal man in the first poem (Hallam I, 194), he stood for the "Ideal Soul" by the time Tennyson wrote the second one (Ricks 671). Returning to the question of King Arthur's mortality, Tennyson brings to it his new belief that individual identity transcends death. The

depiction of King Arthur's last battle and his journey to Avalon reflect the implications of this belief. It is no longer the "Death of Arthur"; it is simply his "passing."

United by common themes and protagonists, these three Arthurian poems also share a pattern of imagery that functions as the signature of Tennyson's inquiry into immortality. At the foundation of that inquiry lies his fear that after death each human soul merges with the universal "Great Soul," eradicating its separate identity. If Hallam as Hallam no longer exists, even death will not grant the speaker a reunion with the dead. Ever the poet of significant detail, Tennyson inscribes the early forms of this anxiety on the imagery of his "Morte d'Arthur." Establishing a technique that will reappear in both In Memoriam and Idylls of the King, he juxtaposes images of universality and individuality. His poetic eye distinguishes component details or blends them with the containing whole, mirroring his fluctuating ideas about the probable condition of Hallam's individual soul in relation to the universal Soul as he pursues his investigation. One may trace the progress of his theory about the soul's fate through the interaction of the two kinds of images.

I. ". . . as far as one can see in this twilight . . .": Tennyson's Personal Idea of Immortality

The human soul, said Tennyson, is "born and banish'd into mystery" (Hallam I, 316 lnt. 3). Whatever we come from or journey to disappears in the "twilight" of finite vision striving to discern the infinite. Yet for all his acknowledgment of the looming dusk, Tennyson held to his belief in the distinct and permanent survival of human identity after death. Indeed, his mind perceived what he called "the Spiritual" as a stronger, more personal presence than the tangible physicality of earthly life. He said:

You may tell me that my hand and my foot are only
imaginary symbols of my existence, I could believe you;

but you never, never can convince me that the *I* is not an eternal Reality, and that the Spiritual is not the true and real part of me. (Hallam II, 90)

Death will unmake the hand and foot, metonymy for the physical life of a body that visibly defines the perimeters of his selfhood while he lives on earth. But if that body is merely an incarnation, subordinate to the determinate soul that forms and fills it, its dissolution at death affects the character of the soul no more than the removal of a glove changes the shape of the hand inside it. His detachment from "the natural" facet of human selfhood convinces him of the supreme fact of the super-natural self's existence. This view, voiced in 1869 after the publication of "The Passing of Arthur," results from a mature belief formed over a lifetime. In Memoriam shows us that Tennyson was not always so certain, and he found even that work more hopeful than he was himself (Ricks 339). But if we are searching for an endpoint toward which his study of immortality advances, his perspective in 1869 will serve us better than any other.

Tennyson's inquiring mind seemed to have room for the paradoxical presence of both faith in and doubt of the soul's endurance, without the one necessarily impinging on the other. In fact, sometimes the opposing views mingled, a synergy of forces evoking and balancing one another. For example, Tennyson describes the experience of inducing a "kind of waking trance" by repeating his own name until "as it were out of the intensity of the consciousness of individuality, the individuality itself seemed to dissolve and fade away into boundless being . . ." (Hallam I 320). From acute personal identification springs its antithesis. Strangely, he maintains the utmost lucidity throughout the experience, at once intensely aware and intensely absent, in a psycho-spiritual place "where death was an almost laughable impossibility, the loss of personality (if so it were) seeming no extinction but the only true life" (Hallam I, 320). As Hallam Tennyson points out in a footnote to this description, this trance appears in Section 95 of In Memoriam, and appropriately so, as it

contains the crux of the speaker's dilemma: how to account for both individual immortality and the omnipresent "Great Soul."

In the above description, Tennyson expresses a feeling apparently at odds with the concerns in his Arthur poems. One is tempted to think that he must have lost his personality if he can view that loss as "no extinction but the only true life." It seems impossible that such a statement could come from the same man who could "never, never" be persuaded that "the *I* is not an eternal Reality." Granted, the trance ends in a renewed assertion of personality: "But in a moment, when I come back to my normal state of 'sanity,' I am ready to fight for *mein liebes Ich*, and hold that it will last for aeons of aeons" (Hallam I, 320). However, it is still remarkable that Tennyson could accommodate such widely divergent spiritual experiences of human identity's permanence. Perhaps because the movement from "Morte d'Arthur," through In Memoriam, to "The Passing of Arthur" marks a journey to understanding, Tennyson's cycle of doubt and belief begins to resemble a pendulum, swinging wide on occasion but returning each time to the position that keeps the clock in balance with itself and synchronized with the motion of the larger entity in which it moves, Time. Or perhaps the certainties he returned to belonged to the socially responsible poet and the man, while only the man could own the doubts.

Another aspect of Tennyson's personal creed of interest here is his conception of human free will. Hallam Tennyson remarks on his father's belief that human life would be senseless and unproductive unless each person possessed a free will and the attendant capacity for individual accountability (Hallam I, 316-317). As usual when speaking on such metaphysical topics, Tennyson stated what *must* be so, the only sane alternative, rather than saying definitely what *is* so. Positing "an intimate connexion between the human and the divine," Tennyson felt that "each individual will had a spiritual and eternal significance with relation to other individual wills as well as to the Supreme and Eternal Will" (Hallam I, 319). If each individual will retains "eternal significance," a close bond with the divine no longer presents a threat. Defining free will as the attribute of or capacity

for personal responsibility, Tennyson found in the bond an opportunity to exercise that will according to individual inclination. At best, this offers a chance at a Tennysonian ideal: "I believe that God reveals Himself in every individual soul: and my idea of heaven is the perpetual ministry of one soul to another" (Hallam II, 420). Revelation and ministry comprise the two sides of the "eternal and spiritual significance" pertaining to an individual human will. Revelation describes its link to God, ministry its link to humanity, one an act of reception, the other a self-expressive act of giving that proves the self remains intact.

Hallam Tennyson tells us that as the poet neared his own death, he contemplated the event with a characteristic blend of fearlessness and humility (Hallam I, xv). Still holding firmly to his faith in the ultimate reality of "the Spiritual," Tennyson's sense of the enormous mystery he was approaching tinged his faith with awe. He seems never to have lost his knowledge of the human mind's limitations, his eyes sharp enough to know how much could lie behind the misty borderland of vision. But acknowledging limitations failed to destroy his confidence in what could be discovered. In 1874, comforting a friend whose wife had passed away, Tennyson wrote, ". . . I may say that I think I can see as far as one can see in this twilight, that the nobler nature does not pass from its individuality when it passes out of this one life" (Hallam II, 155).

II. "Strange Faces, Other Minds": Critical Studies of Tennyson's Conception of Immortality

Tennyson might well feel, among present-day scholars, somewhat like Bedivere in his old age, relating his Arthurian saga to listeners who hear only some of the stories he tells, and perhaps miss the ones most crucial to the teller. Few studies now address the problem of individual immortality in Tennyson's poetry, or its solution. Individuality certainly receives discussion, but it is Tennyson's constructions of his own identity that

receive the most attention, eclipsing his concern for the survival of Arthur Hallam's. Especially in critiques of In Memoriam, the focus of analysis rests either on the speaker's development or on his resolution of the conflict between science and theology, perhaps because of the historical link between the speaker's experience and that of Tennyson himself (critics tend to refer to the speaker as "Tennyson"). When Arthur Hallam's soul comes under consideration, critics choose to examine it solely in relation to Tennyson's speaker.

An article by Gordon Hirsch and one by Alice Chandler offer representative arguments concerning In Memoriam. Hirsch discusses Tennyson's conception of the soul, but only as a side issue in the poem. Indeed, he believes the poem "shifts from the question of the soul's immortality to the attainment of a wisdom that can comprehend a universe ordered by love" (Hirsch 98). The soul functions as a nameless stepping-stone. Tennyson's quest for meaning holds center stage. Hirsch finds Arthur Hallam's soul to be "a mediator between the poet and God," the means by which Tennyson's speaker regains connection with God and consequent understanding of the universal order (Hirsch 99). Hirsch observes Tennyson's speaker achieving love for God through his love for Hallam, granting human emotion to an immortal soul, but in a sense strangely impersonal to that soul (Hirsch 103). Indeed, Hirsch reads in the poem a loss of individuality after death, precisely the thing Tennyson's speaker fears. This would logically prevent the restoration of peace that Hirsch and other critics find in the poem's conclusion. How could the speaker, by loving Hallam, achieve peace in the dissipation of Hallam's personal identity?

Alice Chandler's article also figures Arthur's soul as the reaffirming link between Tennyson and God that effects the poem's resolution. In her consideration of the function of love in "Maud," she derives corroborating evidence from In Memoriam. Like Hirsch, she finds the speaker able to make sense of the universe and trust in the benevolence of its order because of his love for Arthur Hallam (Chandler 98). Since the poem lies outside the focus of her study, she only mentions the idea of the soul when discussing the

protagonists' quests for "a mystical vision of harmony and love" in their worlds (Chandler 100). However, like Hirsch she presents love not as intrinsic to Hallam's soul, but as a force cooperating with it to achieve peace for the speaker. This robs the dead man of any capacity for personal response. She too finds that "man's individual will seems unimportant . . ." (Chandler 100). Somehow his friend's personality disappears in that act of cooperating. But Tennyson's speaker seeks more than a vehicle to "a mystical vision." He needs contact with Hallam himself, not access to a cosmic link to love and harmony.

Dennis M. Welch, Peter Allan Dale, and Alan Sinfield play variations on the theme of Arthur Hallam as the illuminating key to universal order. Dale dances around the edge of granting personal emotion to Arthur's immortal soul (Dale 157). He remarks that Tennyson's speaker maintains belief in the soul's immortality but fears that "the friend by taking on a new form (spirit) has become entirely alienated from the poet's love" (Dale 159). Arthur momentarily survives his transformation, but once again, the discussion removes individuality from any emotion connected with the immortal. Dale's argument evolves into a depiction of Arthur's soul as an embodiment of love that reassures its object of the good order ruling the universe. This attributes love to Hallam, but (as usual) makes this love too abstract to be personal. Hallam does not so much love as convey love (Dale 165). The question of the individuality of the soul remains unanswered.

Both Sinfield and Welch come at the issue of immortality by examining the speaker's need to discover a link between the living and the dead. Sinfield's reading of In Memoriam finds that "the human spirit may transcend death" and that "the material and the spiritual are connected . . ." (Sinfield 247, 250). Yet he sees a lack of individuality after death, the merging of the individual soul with the "Divine Consciousness," which the speaker fears will prevent reunion with Arthur forever (Sinfield 250). Welch also notes a belief in immortality in the poem, connected to the presence of links between this world and the next (Welch 174). Further, he supports the standard conception of love as revelatory, as the means by which the speaker comes upon the true relationship between the natural

and spiritual worlds (Welch 174). What these two studies fail to address is the specific goal at the center of any search for links between worlds that the speaker undertakes. Tennyson's speaker only seeks a link to the dead in order to find a link to his dead friend. His consideration of the entire immortal realm rises out of his concern for Arthur. Without a specific link between the speaker and Arthur's soul, the clearest evidence of interaction between this world and the next accomplishes nothing. Tennyson's speaker wants not so much to locate the dead as to ascertain that the dead man remains the personal friend who died. He will find the answer to his uncertainty by studying the soul's fate and function. But more than that, he will find it by rediscovering his friend's soul, the personal Arthur. For this man, the universal answers lie in the particular instance.¹

Early in Tennyson criticism, a study specifically articulated the poet's concern with individual immortality. Charles F. G. Masterman, in 1899, distilled a series of philosophical, theological, and metaphysical principles from Tennyson's poetry. As he pursued Tennyson's theory of the self, Masterman addressed his theory of immortality in terms of selfhood's fate. Establishing Tennyson's idea of selfhood, or personality, as inherently distinct from other selves and from its surroundings, Masterman found the poet inquiring into "the past and the future" of the self: "Is this self eternally and timelessly One, unique, peculiar, forever separate? or is it part of a spiritual consciousness only differentiated in this material world, here developing personality, afterwards to be

¹Several studies explore the possibility of a homosexual relationship between Hallam and Tennyson, frequently citing *In Memoriam* as evidence. Such scholars as Craft, Sedgwick, and Dellamora find in the poem an indeterminate quality that permits Tennyson to both deny or defer his desire and simultaneously sustain it. Hammond also shares this view of the poem as carefully ambiguous. In any event, this thesis will not address the question of a homosexual relationship between the two friends because it does not bear on my subject. My study of *In Memoriam*, and Tennyson's other Arthurian poetry, focuses on his inquiry into the nature of immortality. While Hallam's soul functions as the vehicle for Tennyson's query, it is the relation of the soul to the cosmos rather than of one soul to another that concerns us here. Craft comes nearest making an argument relevant to this concern, as he posits a conflation of Hallam and a Christ figure in *In Memoriam*. However, Craft views the possible merging of friend and deity as a means of chastening or alleviating desire, not an exploration of the immortal state as such. As do other studies in this school, Craft discusses Tennyson's response to Hallam's physicality, and his loss of it, rather than the question of the human soul's relation to the Great Soul after death removes physical boundaries.

reabsorbed into the Universal?" (67). Without citing much specific evidence, and certainly none on the level of textual analysis, Masterman still arrived at the same answer to this question one can obtain through such an analysis. Recognizing that "survival of the individual personality after death was the fundamental principle of all [Tennyson's] teaching" (73), Masterman concluded that Tennyson reconciled this principle with his awareness of the universe as a unified entity when he realized the mutual dependency of the individual and the universal. Believing that everything in the universe works to re-establish some original unity, he yet maintained that this unity would not "be the unity of formless chaotic energy," but rather "the conscious merging of self in the higher Consciousness, in which the individual is not destroyed but only come to its ultimate fruition" (Masterman 127). According to Masterman, Tennyson reached this conclusion toward the end of his life, after years of careful and sometimes agonizing thought (128). Although he mentioned other shorter poems, Masterman constructed Tennyson's answer to this question chiefly from In Memoriam, failing to note the presence of both question and answer in the poet's treatment of his other Arthur. However, "The Passing of Arthur," published almost twenty years after In Memoriam, reflects this same awareness of the individual's relationship with the universal, as will be discussed below.

Another broad study of Tennyson's work comes close to noting the image dialogue between universality and individuality, although it focuses on poems written up to 1850 and therefore does not consider "The Passing of Arthur." The author, Clyde de Ryals, indicates a dialectic technique Tennyson employs to present and resolve tensions between opposite views or entities. Beginning with such early poems as "Armageddon," Ryals traces what he calls "*the* Tennysonian method," in which a struggle between contrary forces produces or enables the speaker's rise to a new level of understanding or awareness (Theme 205). Ryals highlights the use of this dialectic in In Memoriam as a means of working through emotional and spiritual complexities. For example, citing the famous lines "'Tis better to have loved and lost / Than never to have loved at all" (qtd. in Theme

205), he attributes the achievement of this "positive position" to the "dialectic, which is plainly indicated by the point-counterpoint effect of the varying images and by the interplay between joy and sorrow, past and present, grief and love" (Theme 205). Once again, however, this study focuses on the speaker's development rather than on answering the speaker's question by inquiring after Hallam's soul. Even were Ryals to note the similar interplay between generality and specificity Tennyson uses to manifest Hallam's continued individuality, the dialectic model would fall short of defining Tennyson's resolution to his problem. Synthesis, the result of any dialectical motion, involves the forging of a new entity from two antithetical components, a gestalt not limited to the characteristics of what formed it, in this case an individual and a universal soul. While Tennyson prophesies Hallam's future development in the afterlife, he tenaciously reserves for Hallam his selfhood. Although his friend participates in a divine plan for the betterment of the human race or the progress of the cosmos, he remains the man he was before death. Synthesis fails to suggest this sturdy individualism, as there would be little place for it in a new-made whole in which one can no longer distinguish the formative materials.

Perhaps because they address the identification of King Arthur with Arthur Hallam, critics reading Idylls of the King focus more directly on the Arthur character than on Tennyson, and, consequently, on Arthur's mysterious claim to immortality. Most studies of "Morte d'Arthur" base any search for metaphysical subtexts on "The Epic," the frame poem with which "Morte d'Arthur" was originally published, missing the considerable presence of such themes in the poem itself (see for example Marcia Culver's "The Death and Birth of an Epic: Tennyson's Morte d'Arthur"). However, critical readings of the Idylls come closer to analyzing what Tennyson says about individual immortality in his Arthuriad. To begin with, a number of scholars provide and discuss persuasive evidence that soon after he heard of Hallam's death, Tennyson began to see a likeness between the King who would reign again and the friend he hoped to meet after his own demise. Hence,

the inquiry after the soul, which characterizes Tennyson's poetry about Hallam, emerges as an equally central factor in his poetry about King Arthur.

Jack Kolb, in a biographical study of the circumstances surrounding Hallam's death, notices many resemblances between Hallam's death and Tennyson's description of King Arthur's passing. For example, both men receive mortal head injuries, King Arthur from Modred's sword, Hallam from what was believed to be a ruptured blood vessel in the brain (Kolb 52-53). Further, Kolb cites Hallam as the "spiritual leader" of the Cambridge Apostles, a position that resonates with King Arthur's statement that his passing will disband his famous brotherhood of knights (53). Kolb also remarks on the similarity between Tennyson's lot and Bedivere's, as both lose Arthur, acquire the need to honor and perpetuate his essential character, and struggle to hope that he continues to exist for higher purposes (53).

In a study examining Tennyson's poetic treatment of not two but three different Arthurs, Cecil Lang depicts Arthur Hallam as a partial source for the character of Tennyson's King Arthur. King Arthur's character grew, Lang holds, from a combination of Arthur Hallam and the Duke of Wellington, another Arthur whom Tennyson elegized (Lang 1). Because he died young, Hallam alone could not provide sufficient material for a regal persona, lacking a lifetime of accomplishments demonstrating heroic qualities. The "flower of men" Hallam might be, just as King Arthur was "Flos Regum," but his early death robbed him of the chance to prove himself (Lang 3). Tennyson turned to Arthur Wellesley, the Duke of Wellington, for the "deeds of valour" and heroic character he needed to round out his King (Lang 3). While Hallam supplied the clean and spiritual soul, Wellington provided the physical power and accomplishments. "King Arthur," explains Lang, "combines the private virtues of Arthur Hallam and the public virtues of Arthur Wellesley" (1).

Lang's study pursues Tennyson's methods of constructing his "mythic hero" king from Hallam, who "was already a myth and had to be made a hero," and Wellington, who

"was already a hero and had to be made a myth" (1). Although this lies outside the scope of the present work, Lang's exploration corroborates the widely held belief that "Morte d'Arthur could also be called *In Memoriam A. H. H.*" (Lang 1). Identifying several analogous descriptions of the friend and the King, Lang highlights Tennyson's emphasis on the "purity" of Hallam's character, noting that "purity" also forms the keystone of King Arthur's nature that remains in spite of all the evil infesting his world (Lang 2). Further, Tennyson attributes to both man and king a "noble mind" and well-bred manners (Lang 2-3). Coupled with other passages and the identification of the Apostles with the Round Table, this correspondence of personal virtues underlines the connection between the two Arthurs Tennyson loved best as a private man. But perhaps most important is the striking congruence between the poet's use of the two characters in his inquiry about the fate of the soul. Lang comments that Tennyson resolves his anxiety with the universal by means of the individual, citing a line from the "Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington" in which the poet asserts that "On God and Godlike men we build our trust" (10). In both *In Memoriam* and *Idylls of the King*, the Arthur characters serve as "Godlike men," and Tennyson makes his peace with "the Beyond" as he learns to understand what happened to each Arthur (Lang 10).

Lang declares that "no one has ever doubted" that "Morte d'Arthur" was about Hallam (1). William Fredeman, in an article primarily concerned with Tennyson's influence on Arthurian art, goes so far as to call "Morte d'Arthur" a "mini-*In Memoriam*," reading the King as foreshadowing "that larger-than-life, transcendent other Arthur who dominates so many of the visionary vignettes in the later poem" (Baswell 267). Further, he finds both Arthurs functioning as support, "when Tennyson finishes with them," for "his firm and life-long commitment to a belief in immortality" (Baswell 267).

Although no critic appears to have discussed the particular imagery pattern this study covers, both Ryals and Rosenberg remark on Tennyson's use of scenery, or characteristics of the external world, to express events in the internal, psychological world

of his characters or himself. Tennyson, according to Ryals, works his poetic "effect" in many instances by means of object description. Rather than describe a character's emotions or thoughts, he strives to evoke their presence by constructing their external world in the form of a reflection of their internal world (Theme 27, 54). Thus, he might signify confusion by alternating descriptions of height and depth, darkness and light (Theme 27). Ryals, however, does not link this technique specifically to the Idylls, since it appears in a work on poetry before their time.

Rosenberg ties this poetic technique directly to Idylls of the King. In an examination of Tennysonian landscapes, Rosenberg states that the poet "deliberately blurs the distinction between character and setting, just as he blurs the boundaries separating past, present, and future" (Fall 66). Interestingly, he finds this technique heightens the "individuality" of the characters rather than lessening it, as might be expected from a merging of characters and settings (Fall 66-67, 107). That Tennyson uses setting to explicate characters and themes justifies a consideration of image patterns as a means of discovering his views on immortality, or the ultimate fate of characters. If, as Rosenberg notes, he weaves emotional content into the visual tapestry of his poetry, why not also seek there for metaphysical content? But again, no connection is made between this individuality, or this technique, and Tennyson's inquiry into the fate of the human soul. Instead, Rosenberg uses his exploration to illustrate Tennyson's construction of time, and the way he moves the Arthur character through it and beyond it. He leaves unasked the question of death's effect on this character who apparently transcends time (Fall 100). While this touches on immortality at least by implication, it excludes the specific quality of Arthur's soul after its transcendence.

A genuine understanding of Tennyson's dilemma and its resolution requires a consideration of all three poems dealing with an Arthurian death, based upon a reading that discovers individuality maintained, not submitted to the cosmos after death. To my knowledge, no study examines the language of these poems in sufficient detail to reveal the

consistent movement in their imagery from large to small, absorption to expression, formlessness to intricacy. That the survival of individual consciousness should be recorded in the most individual components of the poems reflects the extent of Tennyson's artistry and provides a tiny glimpse of the complexity of his mind.

III. Establishing Inquiry and Pattern: "Morte d'Arthur"

Like an unfinished painting, the opening scene of "Morte d'Arthur" depicts a series of massive objects blocked in without nuance: "battle," "mountains," and "sea" (1-2).² Tennyson leaves the setting without a place name and makes time no more specific than "all day long" (1). Although "battle" implies the presence of human beings, our first contact with it is its impersonal "noise," which "rolled among the mountains" (1-2). From this echoing vastness, the poet moves directly to human death: "Until King Arthur's table, man by man, / Had fallen in Lyonesse about their Lord, / King Arthur . . ." (3-5). Here are the first images of individual identity, but they describe the death of individuals. Tennyson moves from the general entity of "the table" to the separate units, "man by man," which comprise it, but only to record their deaths. Paradoxically, this obliteration of individuals establishes King Arthur as a distinct identity, stripping away his table, his knights, and leaving only the man himself. The paradox implicitly states Tennyson's dilemma: his awareness of death's destructive potential and his hope that human identity may transcend that destruction.

Next, the poet introduces "Sir Bedivere, the last of all the knights" (7), who traditionally represents Tennyson as the man left behind who must come to terms with

²Citations from the poems refer to line numbers as they appear in the versions of the poems printed in the Ricks edition. Please see Works Cited for further bibliographic information.

loss.³ Notable for his deep love of King Arthur and his continual rebellion against the king's fate, Bedivere personifies the mourner whose love both drives his need for understanding and hinders his ability to accept what he tries to understand. Bedivere's struggle and Tennyson's continuing play with individuality and universality center to a large extent around the disposal of Excalibur. King Arthur describes his sword as "my brand Excalibur, / Which was my pride" (27-28). As a tangible form of the king's power and agency, his sword represents Arthur's earthly persona: king and knight. Arthur recounts the story of how he acquired Excalibur, how he "took it, and have worn it, like a king," equating it with his identity and reminding us of its myriad associations, its centrality to Arthur's personal history (32-33). He remarks that the story of the sword will remain inseparable from his own story in posterity (34-35). Excalibur embodies the characteristics and history of his life.

Tennyson underlines this metonymy by the wealth of detail in the description of Excalibur. Further, the details are expressed as closer specification of more general statements. We move from "the haft" to the "diamond sparks" that "twinkled" on it, from "myriads" to "topaz-lights" (56-57). Interrupting the description of Excalibur, the description of the moonlight reiterates another dimension of Arthur's situation. Tennyson assembles a progressively more detailed picture of the moon, a representative of things universal. Beginning with "the moon," Tennyson traces the path of its light from "the skirts of a long cloud," to the "frost against the hilt" of Excalibur, to the individual crystals of that frost, the "diamond sparks" (53-56). Moonlight glittering on Excalibur presents an interaction between human and celestial entities, in miniature. Human individuality triumphs in this encounter: Excalibur only grows more beautiful in the light.

Yet Tennyson prefaces this vision of Arthur's power with the darker scene encompassing it. Bedivere helps the wounded king into a ruined chapel "on a dark strait of

³Marcia Culver also notes the similarity between Bedivere's relationship to Arthur and Tennyson's to Hallam (54).

barren land" apparently featureless and nameless (5-10). The poet surrounds this place with immense images of the universal: "On one side lay the Ocean, and on one / Lay a great water, and the moon was full" (11-12). The utter lack of detail, of limit, of any kind of specificity that accompanies the solitary king, suggests confrontation with his dreaded disappearance by immersion in the larger entity. The traditional association of water with passage to the Otherworld reinforces this idea.

Just before describing King Arthur's sword, Tennyson expands on the theme of absorption into generality by means of the landscape through which Bedivere journeys to the lake. When Arthur commands him to throw Excalibur into the lake, Bedivere leaves his king reluctantly and, presumably, recrosses the same "dark strait" that Tennyson left so featureless in his first mention of it. With Arthur significantly absent, the poet can fill in the details. His first addition to the scene is a graveyard. The moon shines "athwart" over this "place of tombs" (46), implying that man's attempts at commemoration of the dead are somehow contrary to natural order. Not merely unnatural, commemoration proves useless as well. Only the "mighty bones of ancient men, / Old knights" remain (47-48). No names are mentioned, ". . . and over them the sea-wind sang, / Shri!ll, chill, with flakes of foam" (48-49). Again, the sea represents the eternal. Wind, like moonlight, symbolizes the "Great Soul." Blowing over the nameless dead, it sings and the individual vanishes.

Tennyson counteracts the use of detail again in this stanza as Bedivere proceeds to the lake. Lulling us with the vividly tangible paths, "zig-zag" with "juts of pointed rock," he brings us and Bedivere suddenly to "the shining levels of the lake" (50-51). The transition from "pointed" to "levels" summarizes the suspected consequences of death. From sharp detail to flat unbounded water, Bedivere brings Excalibur, just as fate brings King Arthur from his life to his merging with eternity. Worse, Bedivere must cast Excalibur into the lake. There could be no more physical expression of what the mourner fears for the man who dies. Submersion.

When Bedivere reaches the shore of the lake, Tennyson introduces the intricate portrait of Excalibur discussed above. Bedivere gazes on the sword and cannot throw it into the lake, concealing it instead "in the many-knotted waterflags" at the water's edge (63-4). Choosing a group of distinctly individual objects over the consuming water, Bedivere tries to avert fate. Yet death and whatever it brings are inescapable. Returning to King Arthur after failing to obey him, Bedivere receives a rebuke. "Thou hast betrayed thy nature and thy name, / Not rendering true answer, as beseemed / Thy fealty, nor like a noble knight . . ." (73-75). Seeking to preserve the emblem of the king's identity, Bedivere has violated his own identity, his "nature," his "name," even his societal character of "noble knight." He must either submit to the cosmic plan for his king, or do violence to the emotional and psychological underpinnings of that king's world.

Bedivere resists a second time because, like the speaker in In Memoriam, he dreads the permanence of loss. "And if indeed I cast the brand away, / Surely a precious thing, one worthy note, / Should thus be lost for ever from the earth . . ." (88-90). What will remain of Arthur if this familiar persona disappears? How can Bedivere, or the speaker in In Memoriam, relinquish the human identity he loves most, upon which the world as he has come to understand it is founded? "What good should follow this, if this were done?" (92) Bedivere seems to feel that King Arthur's chances of immortality depend on the preservation of this sword, this unique identity. Without Excalibur, "What record, or what relic of my lord / Should be to aftertime, but empty breath / And rumours of a doubt?" (98-100) Emblematically, the sword must remain for Arthur as Arthur to remain. There can be no immortality for an individual unless his individuality survives. Envisioning the consequences of Excalibur's preservation, Bedivere thinks of it kept "in some treasure-house of mighty kings" (101). This image implies the preservation of the individual in the larger whole, symbolized by the sword within the "treasure-house." Then Bedivere foresees "some old man . . . in the aftertime" (107) spinning tales of Arthur's exploits

around the honored "relic" (98). This human speaker replaces "empty breath" and "rumours" with stories about Arthur, the comprehensible immortality of oral tradition.

Yet Arthur greets this second failure to obey as he did the first. Bedivere's action renders the knight "miserable and unkind, untrue, / Unknightly, traitor-hearted!" (119-120). Unless Bedivere obeys, his identity will be worse than destroyed. It will be turned to evil. He journeys a third time to the lake to obey. Excalibur, in its final moments, radiates power. From the second of its release from Bedivere's hand,

The great brand

Made lightnings in the splendour of the moon,

And flashing round and round, and whirled in an arch,

Shot like a streamer of the northern morn,

Seen where the moving isles of winter shock

By night, with noises of the northern sea.

So flashed and fell the brand Excalibur . . . (136-142)

Once more encountering the universal, as represented by the moon, Arthur's sword confronts its light with "lightnings" of its own. The intensity of its motion over the lake elicits the aurora borealis simile, framed by the thunder of icebergs crashing together in the "northern sea." King Arthur receives his mortal wound fighting a great battle. (Arthur Hallam died young, in full grasp of his considerable intellectual and creative brilliance.) So, too, Excalibur demonstrates its preternatural might in the last seconds of its recorded existence. Then an arm rises out of the lake, grasps Excalibur and pulls the sword "under in the mere" (161). Both Tennyson and Bedivere refer to Excalibur using the male pronouns "he" and "him" in this scene, employing the sword as an allusion to its owner.

Satisfied with Excalibur's fate, King Arthur rises to approach his own. The first time Arthur speaks to Bedivere in the poem, the king mentions the prophecy that he will return to rule Britain in the future, but frames it with his own conviction that he will "perish" (22-26). Disposing of Excalibur seems both a means of getting the "help" without

which he cannot survive the night (26-27), and some form of last rites for his time on earth. Once Excalibur is gone, the king tells Bedivere, "My end draws nigh; 'tis time that I were gone" and asks his knight to carry him to the lake's edge (163-165). Yet he ends this comment with the fear that his "wound hath taken cold" and will kill him (165-166).

Arthur appears to fluctuate between an effort to fulfill Merlin's prophecy and a recurring certainty of its untruth. Consequently, a sense of doubt and foreboding increases from this point until the end of the poem.

Now Tennyson gives us an intensely personal glimpse of Arthur, "looking wistfully with wide blue eyes,"⁴ then counteracts this view by objectifying it, "as in a picture" (169-170). Literally, word for word, Bedivere returns King Arthur's look on the other side of this objectification, "remorsefully . . . through tears" (171). That depersonalizing phrase separates the grieving friends. They lean across it painfully, aware of the greater barriers soon to come.

As Bedivere carries King Arthur to the lake, Tennyson heightens the distinction between living and dying. While Arthur struggles to breathe and worries that "it is too late and [he] shall die" (180), Bedivere becomes a "larger than human" figure of strong action (183). In fact, his strength increases in proportion to his awareness of the greater powers around him. "He heard the deep behind him, and a cry / Before. His own thought drove him, like a goad" (184-185). No longer ignorant or rebellious, Bedivere still makes the landscape echo with his armored footsteps. Tennyson magnifies these human sounds to fill the space around them. ". . . The bare black cliff clanged around him, as he based / His feet on juts of slippery crag that rang / Sharp-smitten with the dint of armed heels" (188-190). Recalling the structure of the first journey to the lake, Tennyson plunges from this peak of human agency to its inevitable disappearance. The poet catches Bedivere mid-stride: "And on a sudden, lo! the level lake, / And the long glories of the winter moon" (191-192). Once more, a "level" lake terminates a scene presenting a human identity

⁴Arthur Hallam's eyes were also blue (Hallam I, 485).

manifesting itself. Added to this, the moon reminds us of the universal, waiting for the human soul, this time unmitigated by intervention with Excalibur's detail.

The poem darkens toward its close. Uncertainty grows more terrible as images of individuality contend more frequently with those of universality. Sometimes both themes appear at once. When the barge arrives on the lake, "all the decks were dense with stately forms / Black-stoled, black-hooded, like a dream" (196-197). Clearly, these supernatural beings maintain themselves as separate entities, but their uniformity invalidates this as evidence of individuality. We see three Queens, but their voices meld together: "A cry that shivered to the tingling stars, / And as it were one voice" (199-200). After this dreadful sound, the poem seems to question whether immortality exists at all. That "one voice" expresses "an agony / Of lamentation, like a wind, that shrills / All night in a waste land, where no one comes, / Or hath come, since the making of the world" (200-203). Equating the sound with wind, already an established metaphor for the disappearance of identity, Tennyson locates it in an uninhabited "wasteland." By implication, this supernatural voice speaks of its own place of origin, suggesting that human souls are destined for this land of nothingness. To go to a place "where no one comes" can only mean an eternity of non-existence. Somewhere between the lake and the wasteland, Arthur will disappear.

Tennyson grants the most distinguished queen a personality, so that we see human interaction once more before Arthur departs. The poet will echo this "once more" scene in In Memoriam, when the speaker requests a moment after death with his friend "to clasp and say, / `Farewell! We lose ourselves in light'" (47:15-16).⁵ As a symbol of resurgent individuality, the queen engages directly and personally with Arthur, even using his name (210). She weeps over him and tries to make him more comfortable, loosening his armor, holding his head in her lap, and rubbing his hands (208-212). Again, Tennyson embroiders his scene with minute detail, noting even the queen's tears dropping onto Arthur's blood-streaked face (211-212).

⁵Citations from "In Memoriam" include both section and line number of the portion quoted.

But this resurgence, like the momentary lucidity that often precedes death, cannot last. The poem launches from it into a de-personalizing inventory of the wounded king. Tennyson likens Arthur's face to "the withered moon" succumbing to the sun, evoking the human soul subsiding into the Great Soul (212-213). Death encroaches on Arthur's capacity for action as his armor now appears "dashed with drops / of onset" (215-216). Alluding to his recent moon/sun metaphor, Tennyson describes "the light and lustrous curls- / That made [Arthur's] forehead like a rising sun / High from the dais-throne" (216-218). But this refers to a past time. Arthur's throne is gone, and his curls are "parched with dust" or straggling and bloody (218-219). His time as the sun, or creative center, of his kingdom, gives way now to the supreme power of the universe. Lastly, the poet compares Arthur to "a shattered column" and flatly states that he is "not like that Arthur who . . . / From spur to plume a star of tournament, / Shot through the lists at Camelot . . ." (222-224). Arthur's physical agency completely breaks down at this point. Likened to a column, his body seems to have all the humanity extracted from it. It will not respond again to Arthur's mind or will. For the remainder of the poem, Arthur speaks but never moves.

When he speaks, King Arthur asks his last knight for prayers. He tells Bedivere that humans are no better than animals if they know God and do not pray, and Tennyson explains this with another image of individuality interacting with universality. Prayers function as individual links with the universal. Arthur tells us they bind "the whole round earth . . . every way / . . . by gold chains about the feet of God" (254-255). Thus, the king's final request becomes an exhortation to maintain individuality.

Avalon, the mythic place of healing and eternal life, gleams through a shroud of doubt at the poem's end. Bidding farewell to Bedivere, King Arthur explains, "I am going a long way / With these thou seest - if indeed I go - / (For all my mind is clouded with a doubt) / To the island-valley of Avilion," described in paradisaic terms (256-259). A fair and fertile summer land this "Avilion" looks to Arthur, but his doubts about Merlin's

prophecy persist. The paradise seems strangely at odds with the sorrowful queens and myriad of black-cloaked figures in the barge. Avalon forms the keystone of Arthur's prophesied ability to elude death. Arthur, as Arthur, will survive if he journeys to Avalon to "heal [him] of [his] grievous wound" (264), but his own doubts undercut Avalon's potential for affirming personal immortality.

Like a swan "fluting a wild carol ere her death" (267), the barge bearing King Arthur glides away from Bedivere over that "level" water.

Long stood Sir Bedivere
 Revolving many memories, till the hull
 Looked one black dot against the verge of dawn,
 And on the mere the wailing died away (269-272).

Arthur vanishes across the void into silence. Distance obscures the shapes and drowns the voices of the barge's passengers and Bedivere, like Tennyson, remains alone with memory. Melded into "one black dot" encountering the Great Soul as its symbol, the sun, rises to meet him, Arthur seems to cease existing. Bedivere holds no evidence to the contrary.⁶

IV. Revelation: A Knowing Faith Finds an Individual Soul

Around 1841 or 1842, roughly ten years after writing "Morte d'Arthur," Tennyson wrote what would become section 95 of the larger work In Memoriam (Ricks 148 note, 437 note). Tennyson's speaker in In Memoriam wants to believe in the transience of his loss, but over the ache of parting looms the fear that this parting will be permanent, that

⁶Tennyson's earlier drafts of this poem offered less hope for the future. Marcia Culver's article, "The Death and Birth of an Epic: Tennyson's 'Morte d'Arthur,'" traces the evolution of this poem through manuscript drafts, from "a purely personal expression of loss and grief into an exploration of the universal human problems of faith and decay" (59).

something intrinsically human and good will disappear forever in its immortality. The speaker is haunted by the possibility that death dissolves the boundaries of the individual, so that even his own death cannot reunite him with his dead friend. Tennyson articulates the speaker's concerns through the first ninety-four sections of the poem. There follows a series of revelations, beginning with the mystical experience on the lawn in section 95, that reconstructs the speaker's vision of individuality in relation to the universal whole he had feared would engulf it. In Memoriam closes peacefully in the understanding that far from being mutually exclusive, individuality and universality function in productive synchrony.

In Memoriam, appropriately for a poem about death, begins at the end. The speaker's final understanding informs the Prologue, which Tennyson wrote after the rest of the poem (S&S, 21-22).⁷ The Prologue both resolves and establishes the problem of Arthur's ultimate fate by asserting apparently contradictory convictions regarding individuality. Addressing the "Strong Son of God," the speaker states that "Our wills are ours, to make them thine" (P: 16). This emphasizes the individual's possession of the will, but directs this agency toward relinquishing its possession to the larger, all-encompassing Entity. Further, the speaker tells his God, "I trust he [Arthur] lives in thee, and there / I find him worthier to be loved" (P: 39-40). How can he name Arthur with a specific pronoun, "he," if he "lives in" this greater Being? What allows him now to find this peace in the thought of Arthur existing "in" something greater than himself?

The assertions in the Prologue grow more troublesome as we plunge into the poem itself. The speaker expresses a fear that Arthur will be lost to him forever, not simply until the end of his own earthly life, a fear arising from his uncertainty about the fate of human souls after death. Tennyson's speaker cannot accept a cosmos that swallows individuals

⁷The abbreviation "S&S" refers to the Shatto and Shaw edition of the poem. All citations from the poem itself refer to this edition. Numbers in parenthesis indicate section and line numbers in the poem, as they appear in this edition. Line numbering starts over at the beginning of each section. It does not run cumulatively through the entire poem. Please see the list of works cited for full bibliographic information.

into some vast conglomerate soul. To find peace, he must satisfy himself that Arthur's death did not remove his personal identity.

The question of Arthur's eternal individuality first arises in the speaker's intention to see his friend again after his own death. The thought begins in his awareness that he must finish his life without his friend. He mourns "My Arthur, whom I shall not see / Till all my widow'd race be run . . ." (9: 17-18). Here he has not yet formed the intention to seek his friend in the future, as that future arises only as an unexamined part of another thought. He has not turned yet from sadness on earth to contemplate the possibility of sadness after death. As he explores his sense of the life of loneliness he will be living, he reiterates the idea that sadness will last until his own death. Contemplating the emptiness in his life, he calls it "A void where heart on heart reposed; / And, where warm hands have prest and closed, / Silence, till I be silent too" (13: 6-8). This is "an awful thought" to him, but still in the sense of separation, of earthly loss (13: 10).

Shadows of an even greater loss emerge in a figurative description of Arthur's death in section 22. The speaker pictures the friendship as a path along which Arthur and himself walked until they met "the Shadow feared of man" (22: 12). The Shadow identifies itself as death by taking Arthur from his friend. Death "spread his mantle dark and cold, / And wrapt [Arthur] formless in the fold, / And dull'd the murmur on thy lip . . ." (22: 14-16). Arthur literally and figuratively disappears, as darkness surrounds him and renders him "formless" and silent. Lacking his own form, he seems to merge with the undefined shape of the mantle. The mantle depicts a negation of boundaries, having no firm shape of its own and belonging to a "Shadow." It absorbs Arthur's shape. Formlessness overpowers form. Significantly, loss of speech follows the loss of form, so that one may almost leap from the lack of form to a lack of identity, canceling the need for speech. Speech expresses the thoughts and feelings of an individual identity. Without such an identity to provide its content, speech disappears. As the section ends, it gathers speed and desperation. The speaker "could not see / Nor follow, tho' I walk in haste" to

the place where the Shadow carries Arthur (22: 17-20). Suddenly we lose the assurance that Arthur will be waiting when the "widow'd race be run." Not even the realization that the Shadow also waits somewhere for him will let the speaker "see" or "follow" to Arthur's destination.

Soon after this encounter with the Shadow, Tennyson turns his speaker's attention fully on the question of a soul's fate after death. Reflecting on the Biblical account of Lazarus being raised from the dead, the speaker realizes the Bible keeps silent about the nature of Lazarus and his existence after this transforming event. Further, it tells nothing of his experiences or spiritual location during the four days before his revival. "Where wert thou, brother, those four days? / There lives no record of reply . . ." (31: 5-6). Drawing parallel lines to his own "man raised up by Christ," the speaker discovers a lack of evidence to support his earlier plans to see Arthur after death. "Behold a man raised up by Christ! / The rest remaineth unreveal'd . . ." (31: 13-14). Coming from the vanishing, amorphous Shadow to Lazarus's silence, Tennyson's speaker approaches an abyss.

Lacking Lazarus's experiential knowledge, the speaker turns to his own to avert desolation. He reasons that his "own dim life should teach me this, / That life shall live for evermore, / Else earth is darkness at the core, / And dust and ashes all that is . . ." (34: 1-4). Both God and human existence would be meaningless without eternal life (34: 5-17). Yet he seems to find this evidence untrustworthy since it relies on his personal perceptions to prove what he personally needs proven. Too great a margin of error remains possible, so he pursues the question into the next section. Here he half reassures and half entangles himself in his search for better evidence. Positing a trustworthy voice from the grave telling him that death is the end, "nor is there hope in dust," Tennyson realizes that his own knowledge of the existence of love would prevent him from accepting that verdict (35: 1-4). But again he doubts the validity of self-manufactured evidence. ". . . I should turn mine ears and hear / The moanings of the homeless sea" (35: 8-9), and no sooner does he turn from his former convictions than he encounters bleak suggestions of the thing he

fears. Love, the foundation of his evidence, turns against him with the statement that "The sound of that forgetful shore / Will change my sweetness more and more, / Half-dead to know that I shall die" (35: 14-16). This denies him not only a positive eternity but any happiness he might have derived from love on earth. Carrying this to its logical end, the speaker discovers that real love would never exist if people were granted a true vision of death. "If Death were seen / At first as Death, Love had not been, / Or been in narrowest working shut . . ." (35: 18-20). Love, like humanity, becomes animal when denied a spiritual dimension. The section closes with bestial sensuality, and the abyss draws nearer.

Wavering between hope and darkest grief, the speaker revisits the idea of seeing Arthur after death. He finishes an analogy between Arthur and a bride gone to her new home with the words, "But thou and I have shaken hands / Till growing winters lay me low . . ." (40: 29-30). Hard on the heels of this thought comes the recollection that Arthur moves in "undiscover'd lands," as opposed to "the fields I know" in which the speaker remains. Uncertainty creeps in to mar the reassurance of that future handclasp. In the next section, the speaker approximates an explicit statement of his fear. ". . . An inner trouble I behold, / A spectral doubt which makes me cold, / That I shall be thy mate no more . . ." (41: 18-20). Even then, he frames this statement in such a way that Arthur retains his individuality. The speaker will not be with him after death because he will be unable to reach the high spiritual plane on which Arthur presumably exists (41: 21-24). He cannot put in words the possibility that Arthur as such may no longer exist at all.

Tennyson then moves his speaker one step further to wrestling with that dark chance. On the way to this struggle, the speaker happens upon a foreshadowing of the problem's final solution, enmeshed in a premise that prevents its full discovery. Suppose, he muses, that "Sleep and Death be truly one, / And every spirit's folded bloom" should rest unconscious of passing time and its own disembodiment (43: 1-2, 1-9). We do not lose individuality in sleep. It merely sleeps with us until returning consciousness brings back awareness and application of it. If our encounter with death affects us in the same

way, the speaker can hope for reunion with his friend: "So then were nothing lost to man; / So that still garden of the souls / In many a figured leaf unrolls / The total world since life began . . ." (43: 9-12). Nothing will be lost because individuality is maintained within the universal whole. "The total world" consists of "many a figured leaf," picturing the whole as the sum of distinct parts. It is a garden of "souls" not of one Soul. But Tennyson knows that sleep and death are not synonymous, and his nearness to his abyss prevents him from finding resolution in any idea of his own making.

Perhaps sensing his proximity to resolution, the speaker stays a moment with the idea of individuality. In section 45, he traces the formation of the individual identity from infancy to manhood on earth, a process fundamental to our reason for living. Our life is directed toward the establishment of our "separate mind/ From whence clear memory may begin" (45: 9). Beginning without the "thought that `this is I,'" we develop a sense of ourselves as distinct entities as we "[learn] the use of `I' and `me,' / and [find] `I am not what I see, / And other than the things I touch'" (45:4, 6-8). The centrality to life of this identity creation logically requires that the product of it survive our death. Our natural life would be "fruitless" if the whole process had to begin again after death. In fact, one senses that this may be the only purpose Tennyson's speaker sees in living a natural life: "This use may lie in blood and breath, / Which else were fruitless of their due, / Had man to learn himself anew / Beyond the second birth of Death" (45: 13-16). However, this reasoning places the speaker back where he started, reliant upon evidence of his own mind's creation. Nor does it address the possibility that there will be no self left to learn after that "second birth." The resolution, so nearly grasped, slips through his fingers and he turns from it to gather his forces and pursue an answer outside of himself. He seeks to pinpoint the rock and the hard place between which he feels caught, and move beyond them.

The speaker defies the hard place as he defines it, declaring that the theory of all identities "Remerging in the general Soul, / Is faith as vague as all unsweet . . ." (47: 1, 1-4). Spurred by this conviction, the speaker asserts that "Eternal form shall still divide / The

eternal soul from all beside; / And I shall know him when we meet . . ." (47: 6-8). But his conviction fails him, as he cites "the mood / of Love on earth" to prove his claim's validity. In the section's last stanza, he compromises, permitting himself and Arthur a momentary reunion to shake hands as individuals before they "lose [them]selves in light" (47: 16). From his own mind, he can only ricochet between these options. To escape, he turns to the other half of the equation, the man whose soul is under question.

The dialogue of hope and despair continues, until Tennyson's speaker forms the plan for his escape. He begins to seek some kind of direct communication with Arthur. First voicing a general plea for Arthur to return to him (90: 21), he translates this idea to a wish to see Arthur's spirit in Arthur's recognizable form. Weary of struggling from the abyss, the speaker follows this request with a multi-faceted denial of its feasibility. Schooled to distrust the fruits of his mind, he doubts that even a vision of Arthur could resolve his uncertainties. ". . . I might count it vain / As but the canker of the brain / . . . I might but say, I hear a wind / Of memory murmuring the past" (92: 2-3, 7-8). Further, he believes such a vision would violate universal law. "No visual shade" would be permitted to return to earth, out of the confines of its appointed place (93: 5). The speaker tries to counter this difficulty by revising his request, asking now for spiritual contact between what is spiritual in himself and the spiritual Arthur: "Descend, and touch, and enter . . . / That in this blindness of the frame / My Ghost may feel that thine is near" (93: 13-16). But even this request raises difficulties. The speaker feels that only a person free from the doubts necessitating such communion would be able to participate in it (94). The very "din, / and doubt" evoking his questions blockade this possible access to their answers (94: 13-14).

Into this moment of stasis and frustration comes the first great flash of enlightenment. With each detail of its imagery and events, the speaker moves closer to clarity and revelation. Section 95, which recounts this first enlightenment, opens with a series of images that set a pattern for the rest of the section. Each image begins with a

larger, more general space or object, followed by the description of one of its more specific component parts. We move from "the lawn" to the grass on it--"underfoot the herb was dry . . ." (95: 1-2). We see "the sky" and then have our attention drawn to "the silvery haze" peculiar to "summer" which colors it (95: 3-4). Drawing in from general nature to human life, the speaker notes the "calm" and then within it notices "the tapers burn unwavering," moving us from an aura to a candle flame (95: 5-6). Even the evening quiet comes to us through a detail: "not a cricket chirr'd . . ." (95: 6). This image pattern continues, giving us the progression from "the dusk" through "filmy shapes" which narrow to "woolly beasts" and finally just their "beaded eyes" (95: 10-12). A strong sense of individual parts distinguished from containing wholes pervades these opening lines. The scene narrows down to the human members of it, and then to the speaker alone as "one by one" the others go indoors (95: 17, 17-20). We are left, in a sense, with the object of his search: a single, human soul.

Thus alone, the speaker's heart and mind turn to Arthur, and he begins to review old letters from his friend. Reading the letters, the speaker gathers up his anguish and uncertainty and searches for his answer in the ultimate extreme of specificity. Moving, through the letters, from "silence" to "silent-speaking words," he prepares us for the focusing of "faith" and "vigour" on "doubts" and the passage "thro' wordy snares to track / Suggestion to her inmost cell" (95: 29-32). All the intellectual and spiritual spaces present in him are centered in this single "inmost cell."

Like an hourglass, the speaker's consciousness progresses from this apex of concentration outward to something enormous: "So word by word, and line by line, / The dead man touch'd me from the past, / And all at once it seem'd at last / The living soul was flash'd on mine . . ." (95: 33-36). Singular and plural run tangent for a moment, as we move one word at a time through strings of words, and one string at a time to the moment of contact rising in their accumulation. Suddenly the words and lines disappear into the

soul of the man who wrote them, the single thoughts absorbed into their source, the thinker. The man's words become a metaphor for the man as they summon his presence.

From this "living soul" and its contact with the speaker's, we ascend into the most vast and limitless facets of the unbounded universe. Even the speaker's individuality blurs as his soul is "wound" in the soul which "flash'd" upon it (95: 36-37). Instead of the thinker, the speaker touches "empyrean heights of thought" and jumps from this into the presence of "that which is", the most infinite universality, from which he "caught / The deep pulsations of the world, Aeonian music measuring out / The steps of Time--the shocks of Chance-- / The blows of Death" (95: 39-43). No specificity remains in this indefinable place of things too vast for definition.

Specific identity returns to Tennyson's speaker instantly when his "trance / Was cancell'd, stricken thro' with doubt" (95: 43-44). But what of Arthur's soul? The only aspect of the experience personal to Arthur was the letters, evocatively read into a vision. The speaker chooses impersonal articles and pronouns--"the" and "this"-- to describe the soul (95: 35-36). Arthur's name and the personal pronoun "he" are glaringly absent. (Tennyson changed a personal "his" in each case to the present "the" and "this." [S&S 112, ftnts]) "Whirl'd" into the realm of immortality, even the living speaker is transformed into something which is not himself. ". . . how hard to frame / In matter-moulded forms of speech, / Or ev'n for intellect to reach / Thro' memory that which I became . . ." (95: 45-48). The earlier section describing the formation of individual identity cited a "clear memory" as the result of this process (45:10). Here this product of individuation hinders the speaker's attempt to understand his experience. The universal cannot be reached via the individual. The speaker seems perilously close to stating that retention of individuality inhibits immortality.

Turning once more from the brink, Tennyson's speaker brings his eyes again to his natural surroundings and this natural vision reflects knowledge from his transcendent, spiritual vision. On a natural level, the last three stanzas of the section repeat the content of

the vision. The first things he sees reiterate the opening image pattern of detail grounded in larger whole. We move from "doubtful dusk" to "knolls" seen through it to "white kine" resting in them, and from "trees" to "their dark arms" (95: 49-52). Ascending from this border of detail, a breeze begins to blow, "suck'd from out the distant gloom" (95: 53). Its source seems to link it to the opening image pattern, but the breeze propels itself out of this affirmation of specificity. ". . . A breeze began to tremble o'er / The large leaves of the sycamore . . . ," echoing the metaphorical identification of Arthur's letters with "fall'n leaves" (95: 54-56, 23). Coming after the vision, the breeze moves living leaves, suggesting its representation of a universal truth applicable to more than this one dead man. Coupled with the earlier reference to fallen leaves, the now-living leaves also suggest resurrection.

The breeze ripples outward from the sycamore to move the air and with increasing strength it blows through elms, the "heavy-folded rose," and lilies (95: 55-60). It figures the eternal, pervading the single members of creation and swaying them to its motion. At its zenith, the breeze speaks, just as the speaker encounters namable entities, however immeasurable, at the height of his trance. Blowing through all living things, the breeze "said / 'The dawn, the dawn,' and died away. . ." (95: 60-61). But in the wake of its passing comes unity, the entrance of distinct, opposite qualities into each other. "And East and West, without a breath / Mixt their dim lights, like life and death, / To broaden into boundless day" (95: 62-64). The breeze, speaking for the eternal, foretells the dawn. Dawn, in literature and common parlance, symbolizes every kind of positive renewal: natural, spiritual, intellectual, emotional. Foretold by "that which is," dawn stands for the achievement of Universal Order. Yet the breeze vanishes before this Order appears. It remains for the extremities of difference to unite of their own accord, "without a breath." Their "lights" are "dim" compared with the "boundless day" resulting from accommodation to the eternal plan. Yet without them, day would not break. Something of the individual remains. The universal whole stems from the orderly functioning of its components.

Comparing "East and West" to "life and death," the speaker alludes to his old dilemma. This unification partakes both of the individual's destruction and of his personal eternity.

The second high point of revelation comes to the speaker in a dream. The vision answered his need for contact with Arthur's soul. The dream grants his wish to see Arthur again in person. What the dream reveals gives a concrete application to the revelations of the vision in just the way that a body clothes a soul. It applies universal truth to the individual case of Arthur Hallam by presenting his place in the scheme of the universal. Appropriate to its function, the dream provides a more visible, tangible picture of the truth conveyed in the vision, which eluded even the speaker's power of description.

The dream's location in the larger poem sets it in a moment of transition. It occurs on the speaker's last night in his childhood home. On the morning after the dream, his family will move to a new house (Ricks 446, fnt). Framing his dream in this theme of transition, the speaker opens his description of it with the time of its occurrence. "On that last night before we went / From out the doors where I was bred, / I dream'd a vision of the dead, / Which left my aftermorn content" (103: 1-4). The last night before a move implies the last moments of confusion before the light of understanding breaks through. It foreshadows the speaker's coming ability to move symbolically to a new place, using the understanding he will gain in the dream. Calling this dream a "vision" relegates it to a similar level of credibility with the first revelatory experience. Seen in the context of what follows, the generic "dead" named here refers to Arthur. The speaker begins on this non-specific note because his first vision confirmed the existence of the Universal. It capsulizes the starting point of the dream in a single word. Yet the dream will leave him with a sense of peace, where he parted from his first vision almost shocked by knowledge. We know from this that the dream will move him toward resolution of his problem. The rock and the hard place are crumbling.

Tennyson's speaker begins his dream in the company of "maidens," not alone as he began his vision (103: 5-6). The scenery perpetuates this sense of community, consisting

of the common dwelling and a river united into existence by tributaries traveling from "hidden summits" through "distant hills" (103: 6-8). Arthur enters this scene of united components as a statue under a veil. The veil echoes the Shadow's "mantle" folding him into obscurity at his death. But where that mantle betokened concealment and unknowing, this veil provides no disguise because the speaker recognizes the statue beneath it as "The shape of him I loved, and love / forever" (103: 13-14). Immediately after this identification, a dove summons the speaker to begin the journey which takes him to Arthur himself. The odyssey from mantle to veil is that from barrier to access. Now the speaker can not only see, but can "follow" to the place where shadowy death took Arthur.

Earlier in the poem, in an agony of searching, the speaker names the blockade between himself and understanding "the veil" (56: 25-28). Sailing out to meet Arthur himself, he now removes the veil. Arthur, no statue but a living being, waits to greet him (103: 41). Blinded doubt of Arthur's continued existence falls away like the veil left covering the statue in the deserted hall. Like the house he will leave in the morning, the hall with its veil and statue are left. His old, incomplete conceptions of the soul remain in the spiritual location he leaves behind.

Sailing to meet Arthur's ship, the speaker paints another series of images relating to separation and integration. He sets out in a "little shallop," discovered on the river that symbolized a whole made from contributing parts (103: 19). On their way to the sea, they pass "banks" composed of "many a level mead / And shadowy bluff" (103: 21-22). Further, they see "ranks / Of iris, and the golden reed . . ." (103: 23-24). Both descriptions picture a larger entity which the speaker breaks down into its elements.

Both Tennyson's speaker and his accompanying maidens undergo metamorphosis as they cross the sea toward Arthur's ship. The sea often stands for eternity, or whatever awaits us after death. All rivers run to it, according to the traditional metaphor, just as all lives proceed to death. Here the sea also evokes the image of unity. The river flowing to it is itself a union of tributaries. Now it flows into the sea, the union of unions, a graphic

depiction of the Universal to which all souls are gathered. Progressing from "deep to deep" toward Arthur, the speaker's journey echoes his approach to "that which is" (103: 39).

Crossing the sea, the maidens "gather'd strength and grace / And presence, lordlier than before," demonstrating that whatever this growth represents affects the human community (103: 27-28). The speaker, in the midst of emphasizing his individuality, also participates in this enhancement. "And I myself, who sat apart / And watch'd them, [defining his identity's separation from the mass] wax'd strong in every limb . . ." (103: 29-30). In this state, he suddenly identifies himself with the human community he so recently excluded from his self-definition. He feels his growth inspired by the maidens, "As one would sing the death of war, / And one would chant the history / Of that great race, which is to be. / And one the shaping of a star. . ." (103: 33-36). These are songs increasingly of the universal, moving from one event in history, to history--the accumulation of all events, to a coming historical event still in the spiritual realms and therefore transcending history. The list ends with a star, representing the farthest point, the unfathomable distance being created. (Tennyson drapes it gracefully over the end of a stanza, a half sentence to give us the feeling of infinity as we drop unpunctuated into the page's white space.) Singing "that great race which is to be," the maiden introduces the crux of resolution. The speaker's realization that all of humanity moves toward this further evolution of itself allows him to understand Arthur's place, as a man and as a puzzle-piece in the universal order. Approaching Arthur's ship, he approaches a unity of the individual soul and the Great Soul.

The maidens' songs of the universal bring them to Arthur, the individual "man we loved . . . / But thrice as large as man . . ." (103: 41-42). Both human and more than human, Arthur physically represents his role as an individual part of a larger pattern. The speaker's reunion with Arthur washes away the fear of permanent separation. The love and relief of this moment surpass words, and the two men embrace in silence (103: 41-44).

Since speech represented individuality, their silence gives their love a universal quality. Like the vision, the dream shapes itself like an hourglass. This deep, wordless emotion brings us to the zenith of individual human experience and simultaneously widens to general reality. The speaker offers no words to Arthur, leaving the moment unbound. With no words to limit and mark its borders, this love links itself to all love, this reunion to all happy reuniting. But here the movement out to universals includes a new dimension. There were words to sing the universal songs, but none to express this individual love. Each instance then combines the universal and the particular without losing sight of either.

Arthur and the speaker continue along the course Arthur was sailing (103: 53-56). The relation between universal and individual takes its last step and slides into place, a positive symbiosis and the resolution of the speaker's dilemma. The dream at its close implies this resolution symbolically. Later sections of the poem state it explicitly. At the dream's close, Arthur, the speaker, and the maidens sail "toward a crimson cloud / That landlike slept along the deep" (103: 55-56). A cloud appearing like land suggests a new, refined form of something old. A purer substance than earth, the cloud prefigures the realm or life of the higher race who will be a higher form of our present, more animal humanity. Arthur, a precursor of this race, seems superhuman because he bears the characteristics of a better humanity we have not yet reached. The speaker and the maidens grow larger and more beautiful approaching him, just as humanity improves as it nears its goal. They join Arthur in his journey to represent that all human beings participate in this evolution. Arthur again becomes an individual case in a larger history, equally distinct and united.

Tennyson's speaker regards Arthur now through the dream's lens. Even describing his life on earth in following sections, the speaker pictures his friend in images that unite his individual and universal qualities. "But thou . . . art reason why / I seem to cast a careless eye / On souls, the lesser lords of doom" (112: 5-8). Aware of the grander scheme, the speaker loses his obsession with individual souls. Compared to his earlier

terror, he now seems "careless," yet it is his personal experience of a personal and immortal Arthur that relieves his fear. Through Arthur, he could see "Large elements in order brought / and tracts of calm from tempest sway'd / In vassal tides that follow'd thought" (112: 13-16). In the first case, specific "elements" merge to a single "order," but in the second a "tempest" divides through catalytic "thought" into its individual "tides." Arthur's fate reveals the cooperative, two-way street at the foundation of reality.

Tennyson's speaker ponders this theme with similar imagery for two more sections. Then, immersed in the sights and sounds of Spring, he tells us ". . . my regret / Becomes an April violet, / And buds and blossoms like the rest" (115: 18-20). Peace.

Section 118 explains the theory of the coming higher race without specifically naming Arthur as its prophecy. The speaker affirms our "trust that those we call the dead / Are breathers of an ampler day / For ever nobler ends" (118: 5-7). He alludes to "the man / Who throve and branch'd from clime to clime, / The herald of a higher race, / And of himself in higher place, / If so he type this work of time / Within himself, from more to more . . ." (118: 12-17). We think of Arthur, "the man" at the poem's center, and see him as the speaker does, as a man ahead of his time, born as an example of what humanity will some day achieve. Arthur's earthly life also foreshadows the continued growth and usefulness of his immortality, making him yet again an individual and a generality.

This poem which began at the end ends with a beginning. The Epilogue centers around a marriage and the birth of a child, through which the speaker weaves the revelation acquired on this poetic journey. Leaving oblique allusions, he tells us plainly that Arthur on earth "was a noble type" of the higher race (E: 138). The child born of this marriage will be a step toward that higher race, yet still a single child. Amidst "ocean sounds, / And, star and system rolling past, / A soul shall draw from out the vast / And strike his being into bounds . . ." (E: 121-124). Tennyson's speaker further defines this act of individuation as it develops simultaneously to specific identity and general type. The child's growth will "Result in man, be born and think, / And act and love, a closer link /

Betwixt us and the crowning race . . ." (E: 126-128). Bequeathing him with all the marks of defined identity--thought, speech, emotion--the speaker shows him still to be this "link," a concept which itself combines the singularity of that one "link" with the plurality of the human trend. The account itself becomes the thing it describes: a picture of a single child and a representation of all children. (The speaker appreciates this link because of his discovery of individuality. Discovering the link by itself, as suggested by the studies cited above, would not have been enough.)

The epilogue closes with a celebration of unity encircling the final statement of the individual. It celebrates "One God, one law, one element, / And one far-off divine event, / To which the whole creation moves" (E: 142-144). Yet first the speaker frames this celebration with "That friend of mine who lives in God," reminding us of the separate human beings who make up this "whole creation" and do not lose their own movement when it "moves" (E: 140). Epilogue echoes Prologue, sending us back to that first placement of Arthur's human soul in the divine care. "I trust he lives in thee . . ." (P: 39). Shining his enlightenment on this phrase, the speaker pours all his new knowledge of the universe into the tiniest details of human expression: the personal pronoun "he" stands out now in the word "thee." "I trust he lives in thee."

V. Once and Future: Mature Conviction Accommodates Uncertainty

In 1869, more than a quarter of a century after In Memoriam, Tennyson brought his discoveries about Arthur Hallam to a second rendition of King Arthur's last hours (Ricks 959 note). He added 169 lines at the beginning of the original "Morte d'Arthur" and 29 at the end, enriching the poem's discussion of the human encounter with eternity, reiterating and subtly altering the conclusions drawn in In Memoriam.

In the original version of "Morte d'Arthur," Bedivere wished to save Excalibur for "some old man" who might evoke Arthur's history from its presence. In the revised version, it is Bedivere, once more the last surviving knight, who recounts the final idyll, "when [he] was no more than a voice / In the white winter of his age . . ." (3-4). For his time, Bedivere creates an earthly immortality for Arthur, as Tennyson does for his. It is the first instance of the new poem framing and fulfilling its original. Tennyson grants Bedivere's wish.

Bedivere defines his role in the tale by recounting how he found King Arthur, before the last battle, despairing over the corruption of his world and struggling to remember that he will "pass but shall not die" (28). Besieged by doubts, Arthur still draws that hopeful conclusion. Yet he questions the human capacity for understanding universal truth. The violent evils raging around him lead him to wonder "why is all around us here . . . as if the world were wholly fair, / But that these eyes of men are dense and dim, / And have not power to see it as it is: / Perchance, because we see not to the close . . ." (13-21). In In Memoriam, Tennyson's speaker earns his peace when mystical vision supersedes natural vision. Arthur can here cling to his hope for immortality by recognizing the limits of human vision. Recall also Tennyson's personal recognition of the difficulties of "seeing in this twilight," noted above. This theme, drawn from discovered limitations and glimpses of what lies beyond them, will inform the altered perspective present in the new last lines of this poem.

Having acknowledged human limitations, the poet begins to address the question of eternal life more directly. Sir Gawain's ghost appears to Arthur in a dream the night before the final battle. This knight, who also died in battle, predicts "an isle of rest" to which Arthur will "pass away" on the morrow (34-35). In the dream, a "wandering wind" blows Gawain's ghost along. Wind will again symbolize the power that obliterates identity as the poem progresses. Here Arthur puzzles over the question, unable to determine whether Gawain himself spoke to him or not. At first, the poem tells us "There came on Arthur

sleeping, Gawain killed / In Lancelot's war, the ghost of Gawain blown / Along a wandering wind . . ." (30-32). Because the dead man retains his name and power of speech, we must infer that his identity remains. But this grows doubtful as the dream progresses. Now it is "the dream" which "shrilled" over the wind, and as it passes it "mingle[s] with dim cries / Far in the moonlit haze," trailing off with destructive images reminiscent of the wasteland imagery associated with the wailing queens at the poem's close (40-45). Wakening, Arthur recognizes the voice but wonders if Gawain actually spoke to him or if "all that haunts the waste and wild / Mourn, knowing it will go along with me ?"(48-49). He presents Tennyson's dilemma: was this voice from the eternal a recognizable individual, or simply the sound of nature resonating under eternity's touch?

Bedivere answers King Arthur with the assurance that the king's name and reputation will never perish (53-55). He explains the will-o-the-wisp quality of the dream Gawain by recalling the same quality in the living man. As he was in life, so must he be in death, says Bedivere, "for the ghost is as the man" (57). As in In Memoriam, a dream of the dead serves as evidence of their continued existence for the Bedivere/Tennyson character.

This assertion that individual identity survives death must immediately be put to the test. Bedivere summons the king to battle against Modred, urging him not think of his dream (58-59). That admonishment casts his statements in the light of reassurance, given more to encourage the king than from actual conviction. It seems that metaphysical theories must apply to Arthur, the loved one, before one can give them credence.

King Arthur speaks more about the issues confronting him in this new version of the poem than in the original. He distinguishes this battle from all others because it forces him to fight his own knights, hence to fight against himself (70-72). He recognizes that something fundamental to his being will be at issue. Writing about his Idylls of the King, Tennyson stated, "By King Arthur I always meant the soul, and the Round Table the passions and capacities of a man" (Ricks 672). Arthur doing battle with his knights

suggests the contest between a spiritual and a physical perspective. But "they my knights, who loved me once, the stroke / That strikes them dead is as my death to me" (73-74). In the context of Tennyson's statement, Arthur expresses here a sense that the death of those "passions and capacities" native to a person constitutes the death of the person. It echoes the old fear that death of the physical self will terminate the spiritual self, yet Arthur maintains a bar against that conclusion. Their death is "as [his] death," not quite synonymous with it. A loophole remains through which he may slip to survive the end of this earthly agency.

Determined to persevere, King Arthur and his faithful subjects journey toward the enemy and battle. Where the earlier poem left the battlefield in an unspecified place, this version paints a definitive and symbolic backdrop for the action. The physical landscape parallels the spiritual place to which Arthur, or the human soul, comes at the brink of eternity. Tennyson names it: Lyonesse, "the sunset bound," an old, old place that rose from and will return to "the abyss" (81-83). Echoing the wasteland theme again, the poet inhabits this place with "fragments of forgotten peoples," suggesting the nameless knights buried by the ruined chapel and the futility of human efforts at immortality (84). Most important, Arthur travels to the coast of Lyonesse, the furthest reach of this borderland between life and death. One can go no further (88-89). Here one grows aware of "the phantom circle of a moaning sea" (87). Like that "level" lake, the sea represents the endless oblivion we fear will swallow the dead. Here on the edge of the eternal, Arthur's last battle takes place.

Tennyson lengthens and refines his presentation of the battle's significance in these new lines. Before, he implied its de-personalizing quality by melting it down to a single characteristic, its noise. He told the outcome, but left the action itself unspoken. Now the battle manifests a physical dissolution parallel to the spiritual one dreaded for the dead. A "deathwhite mist" blankets "sand and sea," engendering "formless fear" in all who breathe it and swathing the battlefield in confusion (95-98). The immediate consequence of this

death mist is loss of identity, a transformation of "friend and foe" to "shadows" (100). Distinctions of all kinds disappear; friends kill each other as often as they kill the enemy, and honorable and dishonorable actions go alike unheeded in the melee (100-106). Even the boundaries between life and death blur as soldiers have "visions out of golden youth" or encounter "the faces of old ghosts" coming to "look in upon the battle" (102-104). Tennyson underscores the mist's symbolic meaning as he links it more explicitly with the spiritual crisis of the endangered and the dying. Knights falling in battle "Looked up for heaven, and only saw the mist" (112). Intense physical suffering, "sweat, writhings, anguish, laboring of the lungs," mingle in "that close mist" with "cryings for the light, / Moans of the dying, and voices of the dead" (115-117). The mist provides a meeting ground for life with death in a way that privileges death by recreating life into something death-like. Earlier in the poem, King Arthur questioned the strength of human vision for discerning the nature of universal truth. The knights represented the natural perspective at odds with spiritual forces. Enmeshed in a struggle with death, unquestionably a universal reality, humanity looks for heaven and sees only the mist of its own finite perceptions. Blindness becomes a metaphor for the spiritual limitations of natural vision.

As the mist encounters wind, the call sign of the eternal, it clears away (124-125). Simultaneously the tide rises, reminding us of an approaching contact with universality as pictured by the sea (125-126). King Arthur rises and surveys the now visible battlefield. Tennyson's incarnation of "the soul" can see after the mist disappears, yet he sees nothing but death. All the representatives of the "passions and capacities" of living men die in the battle; "only the wan wave / Brake in among dead faces, to and fro / Swaying the helpless hands, and up and down / Tumbling the hollow helmets of the fallen . . ." (129-132). The sea graphically appropriates the dead, who move now only at its will. Tennyson's image describes them in individual parts, but with an effect of dehumanization, not celebration of identity. There remains only the one human soul, Arthur, the test case approaching the great test.

Replacing the human-created sounds of battle, a "great voice that shakes the world" brings King Arthur to the last stage of confusion. "O Bedivere . . . I know not what I am, / Nor whence I am, nor whether I be King. / Behold I seem but King among the dead" (143-146). Arthur, the soul, survives the battle that obliterates the earthly manifestations of personality symbolized by his knights. Now he must survive interaction with whatever follows natural death. True to Merlin's prophecy, this Arthur will not physically die as Arthur Hallam did. But as the prototypical human soul, his identity must transcend the loss of his presence on earth, even if that presence merely relocates to Avalon. He must be able to participate in the fate assigned to him and remain himself, just as Hallam retains the dual nature of individual being and component in a divine plan.

Bedivere helps King Arthur through this stage of his identity test. When Arthur voices his confusion, Bedivere declares that he will worship Arthur as king alive or dead, implying that death makes no difference to Arthur's identity (147-149). He follows this statement with an exhortation to action, indicating Modred, the traitor, who remains to be conquered (145-153). Linking self-definition with a call for an action intrinsic to that definition, Bedivere brings Arthur successfully out of his confusion. At this point, the new material ends and the original "Morte d'Arthur" begins, providing the body of the revised poem.

"Morte d'Arthur" closed on silence and doubt. The last of the Idylls of the King turns from that silence to Bedivere, the man left standing on the shore of the water Arthur crosses without him. From this bleak coast, he begins to climb as he mourns King Arthur. The poet touches on the idea of individuals partaking in the larger scheme as Bedivere says "The King is gone," recalling Merlin's "weird rhyme" about Arthur's fate: "'From the great deep to the great deep he goes'" (443-445). Arthur's fate fulfills the prophecy, the plan for his life. Significantly, the king is "gone," not dead.

Struggling to find meaning, Bedivere achieves a series of new visions as he climbs higher and higher above the shore. At his first pause, he can see the barge again and

conjectures that Arthur "passes to be King among the dead" and will return when his wound heals (449-450). Then a recollection of the wailing queens casts him again into doubt. Continuing his climb, he hears "Sounds, as if some fair city were one voice / Around a king returning from his wars" (460-461). The united voice and the individual king invoke the sense of Arthur as part of a higher realm, playing an assigned role but retaining his selfhood, like Arthur Hallam acting as precursor of a higher race. Tennyson couples this sense with one of resurrection. The sound Bedivere hears comes faintly, "As from beyond the limit of the world"(458). It recreates the mournful wail as the poet likens it to "the last echo born of a great cry" and then replaces it with the joyful voice of the city welcoming its king (459-460).

Bedivere, toiling "to the highest he could climb" (463), symbolizes a movement out of the earthly perspective represented by the mist. He achieves his final view by "straining his eyes," suggesting the human effort to raise a limited understanding beyond the reach of its limitations (464). At the pinnacle of this journey, Bedivere thinks he sees "the speck that bare the King" and he watches it reach the eternal (465). Previously, Bedivere's last sight was the hull of the barge, appearing like "one black dot against the verge of dawn" (439). Now the King's identity outlasts that of the barge, which has become a non-descript "speck" while Arthur retains a name. Yet we cannot be certain what Bedivere sees. He "saw . . . or thought he saw" that "speck" (463-465). Tennyson here emphasizes the finite bounds of human vision, while putting a hopeful cast on the scene. Although dawn claims ascendancy for the sun, it also heralds the "new sun" bringing the "new year" (469). The sun must still comprise the powerful universality into whose "light" the king "vanishes" (468). But it is a new sun, reflecting the new understanding of that universality the poem expresses. Without question, King Arthur disappears into "the deep" and "the light" at the poem's close (466-468). Bedivere's eyes cannot penetrate the place where Arthur goes, so the poem must end with only the suggestion of resolution. It is not the peaceful knowledge of the poet fresh from the dream and the vision that convinced him

of Arthur Hallam's immortality. An older man, approaching his own death, the poet writes less definitely of things that stretch the borders between knowledge and belief. "Up to the end he faced death with the same earnest and unflinching courage that he had always shown," notes his son, "but with an added sense of the awe and the mystery of the Infinite" (Hallam I, xv). But it is doubt without darkness now. Bedivere's climb, like the speaker's mystical knowledge in In Memoriam, widens his perspective and strengthens his hope. Distance, not mist, obscures Bedivere's vision at the end. We close, not on a dark shore, but on a sunlit pinnacle.

VI. "Rex Quondam, Rexque Futurus," Amicus Quondam, Amicusque Futurus

It is hard to separate the man from the poet, the professed conviction from the nagging uncertainty. Like the end of a symphony, the last lines of Idylls of the King sound notes from all the composition's major themes: triumph, defeat, doubt and certainty, however unexplainable. No single line of melody covers all the rest, dissolving the complex point and counterpoint to a simple tune. "Nothing worthy proving can be proven," and Tennyson as always fits form to content in every sense, providing us with sufficient evidence for both sides, because life convinced him that he must overcome the need for evidence if he wanted to achieve conviction. Nevertheless, Tennyson the man turned, especially in later years, toward an unshakable belief that human identity transcended death, and Tennyson the poet marked the path to this transcendence and his own discovery of it in the image patterns he used to chronicle the life, the passing, and the immortality of his two Arthurs. His dual exploration into the question of Arthurian immortality resulted each time in the same conclusion: that human vision must recognize the bounds of its perception, but that it is only reasonable to conclude that human identity is not effaced by death or its complicity with divine plans. Rather it functions to its fullest

extent individually inside those plans, holding its shape within a larger shape as a cell does inside a body. In his own words, "every man has and has had from everlasting his true and perfect being in the Divine Consciousness" (Hallam I, 324).

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