

The poems

Tennyson's juvenile and unfinished works, 'The Devil and the Lady' and 'Armageddon', were written two or three years after the death of Keats in 1821, and Shelley in 1822. Although dates alone prove little, the fact is worth remembering, to prevent us from thinking that the great Victorian poets are separated by many years from the younger Romantics. But the differences of thought and mode are great. Among the most characteristic works of the English Romantics are 'The Prelude', 'Kubla Khan', and 'Prometheus Unbound'. In the first, the 'work of glory', or the long philosophical poem which haunted the Romantic poets, changes to doubt and uncertainty in Wordsworth's hands, and he turns from it to charting the early struggles of his mind to deal with the mysterious world of things. In the short 'Kubla Khan' of Coleridge, the world of action, in the great Khan who built the mighty dome, is in a sense superseded by the dream of the act of the poetic imagination, by which the dome might be built in air by song. Shelley's magnificent 'Prometheus Unbound' is a continuation of the 'Prometheus Bound' of the Greek dramatist Aeschylus, in which the mind regenerates itself by an act of will, and overcomes the tyrant which it has created, and by which it has been enslaved. This drama is basically a single symbolic act, and succeeds as the unfinished 'Hyperion' of Keats probably could not have done. So far as we can understand, 'Hyperion', which Keats abandoned, was to have been a brief epic expressing the evolutionary idea of 'the eternal law / That first in beauty should be first in might'. Although it is the most intellectual of Keats's poems, it is difficult to see how the epic mode of extended narrative could have expressed this, as Shelley's lyric drama embodied the single act of regeneration. Although Wordsworth confronted the mysteries of being virtually without myth, Shelley and Keats returned to an earlier mode of apprehension in their adaptation and creation of myth, such as those of Prometheus and Jupiter, Apollo and 'Hyperion'. With the Victorian poets, the great vision and the optimism of the imaginative constructions largely disappear, and so does the unitary or single structure.

The characteristic long poetic works of the later nineteenth century are 'In Memoriam' and 'Idylls of the King' of Tennyson, 'The Ring and the Book' of Browning, and 'Modern Love' of Meredith. The structure of 'In Memoriam' and 'Modern Love' is respectively that of a sequence of short elegies, and sonnets; that of 'Idylls of the King' and 'The Ring and the Book' of a series of idylls, and monologues. In place of the great mythic forms of 'Prometheus Unbound', there is the immediacy of individual experience. Of course regeneration in 'The Prelude' is also highly individual, as individual as the operation of the symbols of mountain and stream, light and mist in the last book, which make up a vision or 'perfect image of a mighty Mind', and which are probably as near as Wordsworth can come to myth. But Wordsworth's poem is unusual in being the story of a poet's mind. The immediacy of the experience in 'In Memoriam' is less that of a uniquely gifted mind, than that of a type of the human race, bearing down loss and fear by will, and with the help of time. Meredith's 'Modern Love' gives the actuality of a failed marriage, a dilemma bitterly defined by the sardonic evocation of older stylistic modes. In 'The Ring and the Book', as G.K. Chesterton said, it is as if Browning had proposed to show us the relations of man to heaven, not through a great legend of love and war, like Homer, or by telling us of the very beginning of all things, like Milton, but by telling a story out of a book of criminal trials from which he has selected one of the meanest and most completely forgotten. The moments of vision are subordinated to the processes of the everyday, and the older and larger forms, which briefly triumphed again with the rejection of the scientific enlightenment of the eighteenth century, have disappeared.

English nineteenth-century poetry proposes less than the poetry of the English Romantics, and, as has been said by one critic, may in a sense be regarded as a domestication of Romantic poetry. In the rediscovered power of the unconscious and the irrational, these poets had triumphed over the enlightenment. But the Romantic poets' Victorian successors had to contend with a science that now immeasurably extended space and time, and with a society which had lost nearly all semblance of a centre. The popular idea of the Victorians as a race of overfed ladies and gentlemen complacently armoured in Scripture and banknotes is

misleading. For one thing, financial speculation was rife, and there were frequent collapses. The signs of a world out of joint were everywhere. What the Victorians had to contend with was modernity, a world that was changing at a frightening pace. They were obsessed with the rawness of modern society, and with the bleak realities of man as a creature lost in space and time. They were haunted by the idea of an age when life had been otherwise, and looked back to the Middle Ages as a time when man was more than a speck of dust in space, or a unit in the minds of statisticians. But there were no great myths by which reality could be comprehended. The 'Idylls of the King' uses only the accessories of medieval romance, to show the decline of civilisation, and the myth of evolution towards the divine that persists throughout the century (articulated briefly in 'The Princess', at length in 'In Memoriam') is shadowy, a matter of earnest hopes and glimpses.

The medium of modern revivals of myth is often vision. When Keats rehandles 'Hyperion' as 'The Fall of Hyperion', he introduces it to the England of 1819 as a vision. 'Methought I stood where trees of every clime': it is at once here and everywhere, the whole held in the challenge of 'methought'. In either version he has his eye on what is to come, although he was to abandon 'Hyperion'. But Tennyson's unfinished visionary poem 'Armageddon', largely written when he was fifteen, breaks off before the great battle of Armageddon itself. It is as if his only purpose is to declare himself a visionary poet, without giving the vision that would confirm it. Perhaps the last battle between Good and Evil was simply too much for the young Tennyson's powers. But the choice of theme suggests that from the beginning it was only a formality.

I felt my soul grow godlike, and my spirit
 With supernatural excitation bound
 Within me, and my mental eye grew large
 With such a vast circumference of thought,
 That, in my vanity, I seemed to stand
 Upon the outward verge and bound alone
 Of God's omniscience.

This, the capacity rather than the act, is what concerns him: 'Yea! In that hour I could have fallen down / Before my own strong soul and worshipped it'. It is comparable in its way to much of the substance of Browning's early poem 'Paracelsus' (1835). Youthful ambition plays its part in all this, of course, but the insistence on the creative mind seems to push into the background what the mind must create. In 'Timbuctoo' (1829), with which Tennyson won the Chancellor's Gold Medal at Cambridge, and which is largely an adaptation of 'Armageddon', the celebration of 'all that makes the wondrous mind of Man' is paradoxically both countered and confirmed by the speech of the Spirit of Fable, who in 'Armageddon' had been the young seraph inspiring the visionary with godlike powers. On the one hand, exploration will reveal the great fabled city of Timbuctoo as a squalid mud-walled settlement. On the other, the great power of Fable is 'deep-rooted in the living soil of truth'. That is, the scientific mind destroys fable, as Keats argued Newton had destroyed the rainbow, yet mind still shadows forth the Unattainable. Tennyson thought 'Timbuctoo' was 'a wild and unmethodised performance', and indeed there is a notable difference between what the Spirit of Fable says about himself and man, and what he says about the loss of Timbuctoo, his latest throne.

Tennyson derived something of this from Wordsworth's consideration of fable and Greek mythology in 'The Excursion' (IV, 631-940), which inspired Keats to take up what Wordsworth had virtually rejected. Coleridge has a memorable passage on the death of fable, in his translation of 'The Piccolomini' of the German poet Friedrich von Schiller (1759-1805). (The passage, II.4.119-38, enlarges on the original, and indeed is almost as much Coleridge as Schiller.) Fable 'delightedly believes / Divinities, being himself divine'; the old intelligible forms

live no longer in the faith of reason!
 But still the heart doth need a language, s'till
 Doth the old instinct bring back the old names.

The old names of Hera, Pallas Athena, and Aphrodite (Juno, Minerva and Venus are the Roman counterparts) appear in Tennyson's 'Oenone' (1832 and 1842), but less as myth than as a group in some characteristic Renaissance painting of the famous Judgement of Paris.

Aphrodite appears several times in his poetry: a single magnificent simile in 'The Princess' (VII, 147-54); a near and dangerous presence, partly divine, partly the process of generation, in 'Lucretius'; a distant but no less dangerous presence in 'Tithonus'. In general, the poems in which Tennyson uses or creates myth are brief, and the myth is often highly personal. That of 'The Lady of Shalott' is more ample than most; significantly, it has to do with the problem of the artist who must and must not remain apart from a society which fears him. Tennyson's source was an old Italian story; nearly everything which he added to it - the tapestry, the mirror, the island - is what makes the poem a myth of the isolation of the modern artist. The myth of 'Tithonus' is more private. As 'Tithon' (1833) it was not published, in an extended and improved form, until 1860 - it was a companion poem to 'Ulysses'. In Greek myth Tithonus was the mortal lover of Aurora, goddess of the dawn, who gave him eternal life, but not eternal youth. Now he lies eternally withering in her arms, in the gleaming halls of morning, begging to be returned to the cycle of generation from which he impiously broke free, so that he may rest in death. A minor myth becomes an embodiment of Tennyson's fear of mortality, and sense of loss.

It is one of the finest of his poems, and is a perfect example of the strengths and limitations of his myth-making. It is very far indeed from the symbolism of Shelley's lyric drama, and Keats's projected epic. No law is affirmed for man, no great action is undertaken. A mortal sickness, or sickness of mortality, a single desolate state of soul, is translated by the myth into a state between mortal and immortal, from which the only release - that of death - is denied. Without fable, Tennyson could hardly have achieved the strange authority of this death in life. What is interesting is the use he makes of fable. The use he made of the very brief episode of the Lotos-Eaters in Homer's *Odyssey* is in a way similar. This becomes a legend of world-weariness and withdrawal from care, so exquisitely sung that the drugged sloth almost frees itself from the Homeric narrative, in which the sailors are brought back to the ship. Withdrawal, of one sort or another, is the common theme of all three poems, and, in its own way, of 'Ulysses'. It sometimes seems that only this, and then only intermittently, could move Tennyson to the creation of myth.

Tennyson saw the changes and the dangers of a polarity of rich and poor defined as two nations as clearly as any novelist of his time. Withdrawal and absence, as we have seen, are potent forces in his poetry, but in fact he withdrew from the issues of contemporary life as little as Browning. The nakedness of nineteenth-century man is nowhere more apparent than in the dream of section 70 (LXX) of 'In Memoriam', where the city crowds of industrial man mingle with the strange beasts on the shores of a prehistoric world.

And crowds that stream from yawning doors,
And shoals of puckered faces drive;
Dark bulks that tumble half alive,
And lazy lengths on boundless shores.

But this is a sudden vision of the world as it seems to a man oppressed by modern society, and the conclusions of modern science. Elsewhere the modern world, with its momentary securities, its social changes, and uncertain future, is less a weight than something lived in, a local habitation for the abiding concerns of poetry. The fluttering of the flame under the tea-urn in 'In Memoriam', 95 (XCV) may seem unpoetic, a minor domestic detail, yet it too presages what is to come. The marriage which ends the sequence is of its time, with its champagne and white-favoured horses. In the poem 'The Golden Year', the older forms and language of the poet Leonard, sung on the mountain where according to legend men and gods may meet, and looking uncertainly to some future good, yield to the modern ethic of present work and present good of James, who resembles the historian and political philosopher Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881): Both in turn yield to the blast from the slate-quarry, where the nameless workers are shaping present and future without words or theories.

This is one of the 'English Idyls' (he tended to use the spelling 'idyll' for The 'Idylls of the King') which are among his most characteristic poems. The word 'idyll' derives from a Greek word meaning a little picture, and tends to mean a poem giving a single image of life in such a way as to suggest that there is much more than it is willing to state directly. In his 'English Idyls'

Tennyson follows the example of his beloved Theocritus, the Sicilian Greek poet of the third century BC. The poetry of Theocritus is very much of its age, which in some respects resembles the age of Tennyson as a cultured European would see it: a sophisticated age of material prosperity for many, and of easy communications and travel among nations; an age strongly conscious of its own modernity, and of the impossibility of recovering older forms and pieties. This is the age of Alexandrian poetry, of the Hellenistic culture that flourished in Alexandria in the last three centuries BC, with which English Victorian poetry is sometimes compared: at its best it followed principles of elaborate techniques, and was generally on a smaller scale than the poetry and drama of a heroic age.

The elegiac 'In Memoriam' is, of course, the monument to Tennyson's sense of what has been. The classic turn in elegy is that from grief to triumph – 'the dead are not dead but alive', as he says in 'Vastness' (1885) - which is found in the 'Lycidas' of John Milton (1608-74), the great poet of *Paradise Lost*, and in Shelley's 'Adonais'. But in 'In Memoriam' there has never been any doubt of Hallam's immortality. (Even immortality is unequal; in 41 (XLI) he expresses the (to us) extraordinary fear that in the evolutionary stages of immortality, Hallam will always be ahead of him, and that he can never again be his equal.) The real elegiac turn or change in 'In Memoriam' is a long swelling movement, rather than a turn, which is natural enough when one remembers its length: 'the glory of the sum of things' in 88 (LXXXVIII); the significant failure of the attempt to meet as spirit to spirit, and the renewal of life that follows, in 95 (XCV); the renewed Christ of 106 (CVI); the courageous acceptance of death, and life, in 107 (CVII); the understanding of the meaning of 'barren faith, / And vacant yearning' in 108 (CVIII):

What find I in the highest place,
But mine own phantom chanting hymns?
And on the depths of death there swims
The reflex of a human face.

But as has been said, it is a single poem only by courtesy, and the diary or confession-like structure sometimes indicates rather than embodies the mind working its way from stark grief, through speculation and hypotheses, to a form of faith.

It is personal, and exploratory. But it is sometimes the case with Tennyson's poetry (or indeed with anyone's poetry) that no sooner have we made a remark like that, than we must admit that a contrary is also true. For the intimate and personal in 'In Memoriam' is sometimes found together with a rather impersonal language, which resembles that of English Augustan or eighteenth-century poetry. At its worst this can produce facile Augustan diction like 'the silver hair' in 84 (LVVVIV), l.32, which is so general that it is feeble. At its best, in lyrics like 9 (IX) or 17 (XVII), it goes back through the English Augustans to the Roman Augustan poet Horace: a phrase like 'the placid ocean-plains' from 9 (IX) has a long tradition behind it. In spite of several deprecating comments on the poetry itself (Prologue, ll.41-4; 48 (XLVIII); Epilogue, ll.21 -4), one feels that in Tennyson's elegies the language itself is a means of achieving constancy. In this stylistic sense (as well as in the more obvious sense that these are poems, and not meant for a single day), the elegies go far beyond the diary or confession, and give substance to his remark, that 'it is rather the cry of the whole human race than mine'. The Augustanism generalises and stabilises personal experience, in an age which badly needed such stability. At the same time, it reflects a tendency in Tennyson to shrink from the world of things. His understanding of things is wonderfully expressed through sight and sound, but there is less sense of physical contact or identification than we find in many other poets, notably in Keats. As one critic has said, 'In Memoriam' is a backward step from Wordsworth's 'Prelude', which was published in the same year, though it had been completed nearly fifty years before. Wordsworth's great passage about the Babe in II, 232-60 has to do with man's contact and kindred with the active universe. But Tennyson's section 45 (XLV) speaks of isolation from things as part of growth. The shrinking in this is the source of some of his greatest poetry, and the greatest poetry in the sequence has to do, on the whole, with fear and despair, rather than with triumph. It is also a source of some of the weakest poetry: the sometimes merely ornamental language, the unimpressive passages of domestic idyll, as in 6 (VI), or 40 (XL).

'Maud' was published five years later, in 1855, and took many of his admirers by surprise, causing indeed consternation in some quarters. In place of the gravity of 'In Memoriam', a strident and querulous voice was heard, raging against its disappointments, and anathematising the corruption of commercial England, with its financial speculations and its lies about peace, its marriage markets for the rich, and its poor huddled in their reeking sties. Tennyson's oddly protective attitude to this monodrama may be due to the fact that he projected something of himself into his neurotic hero. An unhappy love affair of the 1830s is probably reflected in it, and it is likely that the monodrama is in some respects cathartic, or cleansing, an attempt to rid himself of some of his unhappinesses and anxieties, or of the memory of them. Perhaps the stability of his position in the 1850s had something to do with this. 'In Memoriam' had more than confirmed the reputation which the Poems of 1842 had begun, and by 1855 he was happily married. It is a fact that Tennyson was more protective about 'Maud' than about anything else that he wrote. Always unwilling to hear criticism of his poetry, he regarded 'Maud' as, in a peculiar sense, his child, and some of his contemporaries commented waspishly on his habit of subjecting visitors to long readings of it. On one occasion, Jane Carlyle, wife of Thomas Carlyle, heard him read 'Maud', and when he had finished said she thought it was 'stuff'. Tennyson then read it through a second time, when she said she liked it a little better. Still unsatisfied, Tennyson read it to her a third time. The story is probably not greatly exaggerated.

The variety of its versification reflects the rapidly shifting moods of the unstable speaker, who goes mad after the death of his beloved Maud, and apparently recovers his sanity only by devoting himself to the national cause in the Crimean war with Russia. As has been suggested, it is an audaciously experimental work, and comparisons with eighteenth-century French melodrama, as a denial of Tennyson's originality, should be treated with caution. The twisted single vision of reality that it embodies is both a modern view, and a modern mode. Something of the progress of the monodrama can be seen from the scenes noted in Part 2. It starts with the hero alone in his house on the moor, raging against the corrupt age that has destroyed his father, calling for war, as more honourable than what is now called peace, and declaring his intention of burying himself in himself. With the appearance of Maud, whom he knew as a child and who is the daughter of the man who has ruined his father, this resolution is broken. He struggles against love, thinking her proud and hard, but yields to his recognition of her kindness. His fears return, with the appearance of a titled wooer of whom her arrogant brother seems to approve. This brother, who ignores him ('Gorgonized me [that is, turned me to stone] from head to foot / With a stony British stare') is now seen as the inheritor of the sin of Maud's family, who apparently ruined and rejected his family. It seems only Maud is pure, by some 'peculiar mystic grace' her mother's child only. In spite of all his suspicions and fears, she confesses her love for him, without her brother's knowledge. He passes into an ecstatic dream of happiness, looking forward eagerly to seeing her after the ball, in her rose-garden. Their meeting is interrupted by Maud's brother, with 'the babe-faced lord', who stands 'gaping and grinning by'. Harsh words are exchanged, and a blow is struck. The inevitable duel follows within the hour, in the pit or hollow where the body of the hero's father was found, and Maud's brother falls dying. Maud is stricken with grief, and the hero escapes to France, where he wanders in Brittany, tormented by remorse. He hears of Maud's death, and returns to London, oppressed by 'the roaring of the wheels', and 'the squares and streets, / And the faces that one meets, / Hearts with no love for me'. The end of the 'second part' is the famous madhouse scene, in which his old desire for burial finds strange expression, and in which the incidents of the story are distorted in his crazed mind.

The third and last part must be considered to be a failure. It is easy enough to see that Tennyson is trying to bring the wheel full circle, with the reminiscences in it of some of the early sections. It is possible to argue that although he said of his hero that he was now sane, though shattered, he is merely exchanging one obsession for another, with his desire to atone by taking part in what is presented as a national struggle against Russia. But although the sinking of his individuality in a national cause is typical of a modern tendency to simplify life by associating oneself with a national movement - a tendency to which the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century bear witness - Tennyson's apparent willingness to believe in this solution

suggests that there were things in 'Maud' which were too close to him to be expressed even in a form of drama. Imperfect, technically dazzling, as firmly rooted in contemporary reality as in mental instability, 'Maud' will always remain as typical of Tennyson in one way as 'In Memoriam' is in another.

The tendency to suicide in 'Maud' is strong, and its conclusion represents a kind of suicide, since the hero looks forward to his death as well as his service, as a form of atonement. Suicide, the death of the individual as a solution and release, is a recurring theme in Tennyson. The fullest statement of it is in 'The Two Voices' (1842). This describes a long night of anguish, in which 'a still small voice' argues for despair, and suicide, and is countered at last by the morning of hope, and the whispered encouragement of another voice. That the joyous natural scene with which it ends contains some rather pallid imitation of Wordsworth (it is an early poem, after all) is sometimes taken to indicate where Tennyson's deeper feelings lay. In the much later 'Lucretius' (1868), he takes up the story of the self-disgust of the great Roman poet, author of the *De Rerum Natura*, which ends in suicide, according to an old legend. The theme is present in 'Ulysses', 'Tithonus', 'The Lotos-Eaters', and in many of the sections of 'In Memoriam'. 'Morte d'Arthur' (composed in 1833 or 1834, after Hallam's death, first published in 1842, and republished much later as 'The Passing of Arthur', last of the 'Idylls of the King') speaks of the king's death, or translation to the Celtic paradise of Avilion, after the destruction of the Order of the Round Table, which was 'an image of the mighty world'. This was the effective beginning of the Idylls, at which Tennyson worked intermittently for forty years, although 'Balin and Balan', the last-written of the twelve idylls, was not published until 1885. It is typical that what the Idylls move towards is death: the death of Arthur, and with it the ruin of civilisation. Tennyson's outlook on life became gloomier as he grew older, and he was inclined to feel that 'In Memoriam' was too hopeful, 'more than I am myself'. The 'Idylls of the King', in fact, depict the collapse of Western civilisation. Like others, he felt that some great catastrophe was inevitable. W.B. Yeats's (1865-1939) 'The Second Coming' depicts the return of Christ as that of a monster, in this age when 'the best lack all conviction, while the worst / Are full of passionate intensity'. Yeats's lines may derive from a passage in Shelley's 'Prometheus Unbound', and there are indications that his monstrous beast has something to do with that line of Tennyson's, repeated in the Idylls, where Arthur looks forward to what is to come: 'the fear lest this my realm. . . / Reel back into the beast, and be no more'.

The language of the poems

Tennysonian verse is sometimes thought to be synonymous with the slow-moving and the languorous, as in the Spenserian narrative stanzas of 'The Lotos-Eaters'. The pulse is often slow, and the language ornate, but the variety is such that 'Tennysonian' in this sense is very misleading. A glance at some of the sections of 'Maud', with their dramatic rapidity and informality, will make this clear. Significantly, the slow pace is sometimes that of the adjectives. In the line 'The level waste, the rounding gray' from 'Mariana', four of the six words are adjectives, or adjectival, 'gray', and even perhaps 'waste', being adjectives serving as nouns. Such an art of the adjective, which turns away from the verbs and nouns of the language of action, reflects the attempt by the single mind to find stability in apprehending what is given, what it sees.

Sometimes the onomatopoeia diverts our attention from more subtle effects.

So saying, from the ruined shrine he stept
And in the moon athwart the place of tombs,
Where lay the mighty bones of ancient men,
Old knights, and over them the sea-wind sang
Shrill, chill, with flakes of foam.

This, from 'Morte d'Arthur', culminates in the onomatopoeia of 'shrill, chill', and many readers do not look farther than this. Yet the passage is more complex. 'Morte d'Arthur' shows a reduction of life from its ideal, to a bleak actuality, and the movement of this sentence, in which Sir Bedivere leaves the wounded and dying king, to go down to the lake, and throw

away the magic sword Excalibur, is also in its way reductive. After 'stept', and the 'And' and swelling vowels of the second line, and in spite of the absence of a comma, we expect a further and more marked verbal action. We do not get it, 'lay' and 'sang' being subordinated to the place of tombs. The effect is that of the further action suggested by 'stept / And' being replaced by a minor and syntactically subordinate movement of feeling, a sort of undersong suddenly becoming the whole business of the period. This is part of a reduction of (and from) action which is the theme of the 'Morte d'Arthur', and of the Idylls as a whole. It occurs also in a vowel-meaning more subtle, though not in its way more effective, than the culminating vowel-music. 'Old knights' is brief, and parenthetical. It takes up what precedes it, reducing it to a passing word, or formality; at the same time, its vowels both shorten and reverse those of the heroic 'mighty bones'.

Although Tennyson can be ornate, his language is capable of great restraint. 'Morte d'Arthur', a highly literary epic episode, is like a nineteenth century dream of epic. (In some senses it is more of a dream of epic than Keats's 'Hyperion', with its broken armour and magic sword, in place of Keats's gods and temples.) It is not only the King who is lost, leaving Sir Bedivere, his last knight, to live on in a cold world without him. An age has been lost, an age of graciousness and high deeds. When Tennyson published it in 1842, he gave it a preface and epilogue which he called 'The Epic', in which the poem is read to his friends at Christmas by a frustrated poet, as the surviving book of his epic poem, destroyed because he thought it old-fashioned. So framed, the poem has the force of an act of despair, yet paradoxically is also something of an act of faith in poetry. We may feel that it insists a little too much on its bleakness, that the coldness and sparseness invoked are those of a highly literary age, but if we compare it with the 'Sohrab and Rostum' (1853) of Matthew Arnold (1822-88), the differences are striking. Arnold's poem is a brief epic-style action, in which a father unknowingly kills his son. There is much less action in Tennyson's poem, yet literary though both poems are, there is little doubt which suffers more from an excess of epic trappings. In some respects, Arnold had aimed at a plain style. The historian James Froude (1818-94), indeed, pointed out that the word 'tent' occurs half a dozen times in the first eighteen lines of the poem, and suggested that Arnold 'had overdone the plainness of expression which he so much studies'. On the other hand, long epic or heroic similes abound in Arnold's poem; sometimes it seems that no sooner has one ended, than another begins. In 'Morte d'Arthur', however, there are only three epic similes throughout, which hardly makes for decoration.

Sometimes it is the terms of an authoritative Tennysonian image which can be mistaken for decoration, as in this, from 'Tithonus':

Can thy love,
Thy beauty, make amends, though even now,

Close over us, the silver star, thy guide,
Shines in those tremulous eyes that fill with tears
To hear me?

The withering Tithonus looks into the tear-filled eyes of the goddess Aurora, pleading to be allowed to die. Aurora weeps, but like Tithonus she is powerless. He sees his answer in the reflection in her eyes of the star of Venus. As goddess of generation, Venus has been slighted by his immortality, and his escape from the cycle of generation, and the pitiless answer to his pleading is there in the reflection of her silver star. The phrase 'the silver star' is exactly at the centre of the passage. This jewel-like intensity is very far from the ornate, or the self-indulgent.

There is a characteristic stillness about these two passages, from 'Morte d'Arthur', and 'Tithonus'. Tennyson's movement can be rapid, not merely in 'Maud': the verse of 'The Lady of Shalott', despite a central stillness in the poem, is hardly slow. In 'Locksley Hall', the apparent forward-swinging movement expresses the struggling of indecision: the long trochaic lines beat out frustration, and that self-contempt which declares itself in contempt for others. His most characteristic movements, however, are the lingering of 'Mariana', which is implicit also in 'Ulysses'; the circling or cyclic movement of 'In Memoriam'; and those movements of

accretion and parallelism expressed by the use of 'and'. The quiet 'ands' of the passage quoted from 'Morte d'Arthur' contribute to the process by which the inactive, and apparently minor, becomes a major principle: 'And in the moon . . . and over them'. In section 87 (LXXXVII) of 'In Memoriam', there is an interesting variation in the use of 'and'. Tennyson revisits Cambridge after Hallam's death, and walks about the colleges and the town, reliving what he has known. Outside the door of what were Hallam's rooms at Trinity College he hears the loud noise of a wine party, and thinks, as he stands there, of the debates of the intellectual Apostles in that very room, when they hung on Hallam's words. During the first part of the poem, the 'ands' express the dream-like state of reliving the past in these familiar places.

And heard once more in college fanes
The storm their high-built organs make,
And thunder-music, rolling, shake
The prophet blazoned on the panes;

And caught once more the distant shout,
The measured pulse of racing oars
Among the willows; paced the shores
And many a bridge, and all about
The same gray flats again, and felt

The same, but not the same; and last
Up that long walk of limes I past
To see the rooms in which he dwelt.

(They are varied authoritatively by that single 'but': I 'felt / The same , but not the same.') In the last part, however, they are urgent and rapid, as they move to a living recollection of Hallam as he was, in his glory.

Who, but hung to hear
The rapt oration flowing free

From point to point, with power and grace,
And music in the bounds of law,
To those conclusions when we saw
The God within him light his face,

And seem to lift the form, and glow
In azure orbits heavenly-wise;
And over these ethereal eyes
The bar of Michael Angelo.

(The last two lines refer to Hallam's claim to possess the prominent bar or ridge of bone over the eyes which the great Italian artist and poet Michael Angelo possessed, and which is sometimes thought to be a mark of unusual mental power.) Once again, and like the sixty-sixth sonnet of Shakespeare, the poem could be described as an exercise in 'and', an analogy with music which is more valid than most.

The great example of the cyclic movement is, of course, 'In Memoriam', as in the abba stanza which is its basic mode. The aa rhyme returns the fourth line to the first, after a separating bb couplet; the effect is to leave something of both rhymes, so to speak, in the air, the bb rhyme being in part superseded, the aa rhyme dispersed. The use of it by other poets shows how Tennyson's mastery of it is peculiarly his own.

Fantastic grow the evening-gowns.
Agents of the Fisc pursue
Absconding tax-defaulters through
The sewers of provincial towns.

This, from 'The Fall of Rome', by the modern English poet W.H. Auden (1907-73), is excellent, but it is hard to realise that it is in the same measure as 'In Memoriam'. The gravity, the slow

parallel movements, the circling, are all absent, despite the rhymes. Tennyson sometimes used the measure elsewhere, as in the epistolary poem 'To E.L. on His Travels in Greece'. The structure of this poem is as cyclic as its stanza. The two sentences that make up the poem begin and end with scenes that Edward Lear (1812-88), painter and writer of nonsense verse, had drawn in Greece, and the verbs ending the first sentence and beginning the second sentence act at the heart of the poem as the equivalent of a bb structure.

The technical expertise of 'Maud' is, as has been suggested in Part 2, not merely a matter of different modes for each section. The sonnet form of I, iii, and the reasons for it, have been discussed briefly there. Perhaps one could add, that the reason why Tennyson chose the sonnet form for this section is that the hero is faced with a new and disturbing experience, which has to be grappled with, and held in the mind as an entirety, so that it can be understood. For such an effect, the sonnet form, with its complex rhymes, and above all its impression of an integral whole, is pre-eminently suitable. This is an example of a master of his craft turning to a classic form as the perfect expression of an experience. The form of I, xxii, on the other hand, with its sudden reversal in the last stanza, is his own invention: so much part of the stage in the drama which he has reached, that it would be inappropriate to think of it in any other context. The repetitions in the six- or eight-line stanzas of the poem are such that they seem to run or dance from the opening phrase, usually ending on a recapitulative repetition, which serves as a kind of refrain. The last stanza, however, begins by recapitulating a phrase from the stanza before it, and the stanza does not seem to begin until its second line, which, instead of repeating what has gone before, introduces what is to come. 'She is coming, my own, my sweet' repeats the third and fourth lines of the preceding stanza, and is not itself repeated, an effect which, by this time, one has learned to expect in the poem.

Were it ever so airy a tread,
My heart would hear her and beat
Were it earth in an earthy bed;
My dust would hear her and beat,
Had I lain for a century dead;
Would start and tremble under her feet,
And blossom in purple and red.

The effect is to cause a sudden rising movement, appropriate to the ecstasy before the catastrophe. The virtuosity of 'Maud', of course, makes it almost unique in Tennyson.

He is one of the most literary of poets. This, together with the fact that he seems to have had few intellectual ambitions other than in poetry, has made some readers suspect his seriousness of purpose. But the accusation of literariness - for it is often used as an accusation - should be treated with caution. Poets have always drawn on their predecessors, and we must not allow our understanding of this to be clouded by sentimental ideas about originality, purity of inspiration, and so forth. The echoes of other poets that we find in Tennyson testify, here as elsewhere, to the authority of that old tradition, of the continual creation by all poets of the one great world poem. Like his English predecessors, he takes from, and recreates, Greek and Latin poets, such as Homer, Theocritus, Virgil, and Horace. He also draws freely on the great English tradition of Shakespeare, and Milton. 'The Princess', his Victorian narrative comedy, is full of Shakespearean verse and image.

loose
A flying charm of blushes o'er this cheek,
Where they like swallows coming out of time
Will wonder why they came

The pace and imagery of this are unmistakably Shakespearean. The simile of VII, ll.147-54, where the yielding Ida is compared to Aphrodite or Venus ('lovelier in her mood / Than in her mould that other') is Miltonic. It is a tradition in which he has an honoured place, because of what he gave it.