

Title	Rebuilding Camelot in Alfred Tennyson's Idylls of the King
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Citation	Osaka Literary Review. 2005, 44, p. 19-38
Version Type	VoR
URL	https://doi.org/10.18910/25307
rights	
Note	

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Rebuilding Camelot in Alfred Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*

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Alfred Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* (published 1859-1885)¹, to whose composition the poet devoted half his life, is a series of narrative poems dealing with the legend of King Arthur and his Round Table. Tennyson loved to read Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* throughout his lifetime, and he planned to write Arthurian poetry of his own since he was young. Tennyson's son, Hallam testifies:

"The vision of Arthur as I have drawn him," my father said, "had come upon me when, little more than a boy, I first lighted upon Malory"; and it dwelt with him to the end; and we may perhaps say that now the completed poem [*Idylls of the King*], regarded as a whole, gives his innermost being more fully, though not more truly, than "In Memoriam."
(2:128)

According to Hallam Tennyson, "[b]efore 1840 it is evident" that his father "wavered between casting the Arthurian legends into the form of an epic or into that of a musical masque" (2:124). And in 1842, the poet published his first verse based on Malory, "Morte d'Arthur."

This work appeared as a poem-within-a-poem. The framing poem was entitled "The Epic." It is set "[a]t Francis Allen's on the Christmas-eve" (E 1). The host Francis Allen begins to tell an anecdote about the poet Everard Hall and his epic to one of his guests, the narrator of the poem:

... 'You know,' said Frank, 'he burnt
 His epic, his King Arthur, some twelve books' —
 And then to me demanding why? 'Oh, sir,
 He thought that nothing new was said, or else
 Something so said 'twas nothing — that a truth
 Looks freshest in the fashion of the day: ['] (E 27-32)

Allen continues:

... 'But I,'
 Said Francis, 'picked the eleventh from this hearth
 And have it: keep a thing, its use will come.
 I hoard it as a sugar-plum for Holmes.' (E 40-43)

Then, "little urged, / But with some prelude of disparagement" (E 48-49) Hall begins to recite his epic, i. e. "Morte d'Arthur." However, after Hall has finished reading aloud, Allen changes his attitude:

Then Francis, muttering, like a man ill-used,
 'There now — that's nothing!' drew a little back,
 And drove his heel into the smouldered log,
 That sent a blast of sparkles up the flue: (E 284-87)

Tennyson presents his "Morte d'Arthur" as the eleventh book of Hall's epic, which consists of "some twelve books." It is often said that by providing this setting Tennyson makes a "suggestion in readers' minds that the rest of his epic would be forthcoming" (Hughes 42). It may also be regarded as Tennyson's declaration that he was now determined to compose an Arthurian epic rather than a musical masque. Moreover, considering the way in which "The Epic" was written enables us to understand it more deeply.

"Morte d'Arthur" was written during 1833-35, and at first read privately among the poet's friends. Edward Fitzgerald, one of these friends, asserts that "The Epic" was added to "Morte

d'Arthur" on publication in 1842 in order "to anticipate or excuse the 'faint Homeric echoes'" and "to give a reason for telling an old-world tale" (quoted in H. Tennyson 1:194). Actually, it is said that in the Victorian period there was a "lively debate between those who used historical settings for their imaginative works and those who believed that a strictly contemporary mood was more serious and proper" (Gent 11). Considering these contexts, I propose that it is Tennyson's irresolution in creating an old-fashioned world, or rebuilding Camelot in his poetry that causes Hall to burn his epic, and causes Allen, who once "picked the eleventh . . . and ha[s] it," to say in the end: "There now — that's nothing!" And this hesitation also impeded Tennyson in completing his own epic.

In 1859, the first series of narrative poems dealing with the Arthurian legend was published with the title *The True and the False: Four Idylls of the King*. It is remarkable that Tennyson chose neither epic nor masque but the genre of the idyll for his first full-scale Arthurian. And the creation of idylls was to be continued until 1885. Why did Tennyson change his mind and write Arthurian idylls rather than epics? Answering this question may give us a clue to the answer to another question: how Tennyson conquered his former hesitancy in creating a medieval world in his work. In the present paper, I would like firstly to point out the difference of genre between idyll and epic, next to show, by comparing some scenes in *Idylls of the King* with Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*, the manner in which *Idylls of the King* is idyll rather than epic, and finally to consider how effective the genre of the idyll was for Tennyson's rebuilding Camelot.

In the 1960s and 1970s, many scholars discussed what genre Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* belongs to. Henry Kozicki in his

short paper "Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* as Tragic Drama" (1966) discusses the work in the context of Dionysian drama. In *Language and Structure in Tennyson's Poetry* (1973), F. E. L. Priestley states that Tennyson was undertaking a "serious consideration of style as related to genre" (66). In the "new and freer attitude towards genre" after Wordsworth, Tennyson "practises the styles and tones of a vast variety of genres" and he also "starts experimenting with the blending or fusion of genres" (Priestley 68). Priestley argues that "[t]he *Idylls of the King*, Tennyson's longest poem, also exhibits a highly complex and very experimental structure" (125) and concludes that "[t]he total structure [of *Idylls of the King*] follows closely the thematic rhythm of drama" (135). Robert Pattison, in *Tennyson and Tradition* (1979), points out the elements of idyll, narrative, epic, lyric, and allegory in *Idylls of the King*, and finally concludes:

The *Idylls* are several things at once. They are an epic on a national theme . . . , but they are also romance, allegory, and idyll; and to perceive the continuity they achieve demands a recognition of all these strains. (146)

From the 1980s up to the present, many critics have been studying the *Idylls* from social or historical points of view, but there has been a tendency to neglect the problem of genre in the work. However, it is as clear as crystal that Tennyson stuck firmly to the genre of the idyll because he persisted in using the term of idylls, even though his work was once called "Epylls of the King" by Edmund Lushington for the reason that "they were little Epics (not Idylls) woven into an Epical unity" (H. Tennyson 2:130n), and because he was particular even about whether to spell the word as "idyls" or as "idylls" (H. Tennyson 1:508n). In order to understand Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* fully, it is necessary to cast more light on what constitutes the nature of the

idyll genre.

The idyll is a poetic genre established by Theocritus. John Addington Symonds allots Chapter XXI in his *Studies of the Greek Poets* (first published in 1873) to "The Idyllists," and surveys the history of the genre from Theocritus to those Victorians indebted to the tradition. In this chapter, Symonds gives the following definition:

The name of the idyl sufficiently explains its nature. It is a little picture. Rustic or town life, legends of the gods, and passages of personal experience supply the idyllist with subjects. He does not treat them lyrically, following rather the rules of epic and dramatic composition. Generally there is a narrator, and in so far the idyl is epic; its verse, too, is the hexameter. (264-65)

As we can see from this definition, there are some resemblances between idylls and epics. In addition to the said similarities, *Idylls of the King* has another element of epic: it consists of twelve books. However, the idyll is crucially different from the epic in that "[i]t is a little picture." After some lines, Symonds again asserts: "In reading the idyls it should never be forgotten that they are pictures, so studied and designed by their authors" (265). What does this difference mean? It has something to do with temporality in the poem. An epic poem "celebrates in the form of a continuous narrative the achievements of one or more heroic personages of history or tradition" ("Epic." A. *adj.* Def. 1). Hence in the epic there is a process of time. By contrast, an idyll is a picture; so it depicts just a high moment of a story. Symonds continues:

They [the idyls] ought to affect us in the same way as the bass-reliefs and vases of Greek art, in which dramatic action is presented at one moment of its evolution, and beautiful

forms are grouped together with such simplicity as to need but little story to enhance their value. (265)

Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* is more idyll than epic in that the poet continuously describes Camelot in the present.

If we postulate that the ultimate future of the Arthurian romances generally lies in their denouements, the fall of Camelot and the death of the main characters, we can regard the causal factors for this tragedy (i. e. the incest of Arthur and the adulterous love between Lancelot and Guinevere) as belonging to the shadowy past. Countless narrators who retold the Arthurian romances in their own words devoted themselves to how to connect cause and consequence in their stories. But what differentiates Tennyson from those storytellers is the fact that he made efforts to narrate the past and the future of Camelot as *little* as possible. His concern was always for the present of Camelot.

The nineteenth century was an important period not only for the Arthurian revival in both literature and art but also for the reissue of Malory's work. Although after William Caxton's printing of *Le Morte Darthur* in 1485 the work had become popular and been republished five times within the following century and a half, there had been a great blank of time for more than a hundred and eighty years before the sixth publication of Malory appeared.² But "[t]he long period of neglect" ended "with the appearance of three new editions in two years" (Gaines 13): they were Alexander Charles's two-volume edition by Walker and Edwards and Joseph Halsewood's three-volume edition by R. Wilks, both published in 1816, and Robert Southey's three-volume edition by Longman in 1817. Following these, "no less than nineteen editions of Malory, including abridged versions, were brought out between 1800 and 1900" (Fuwa, "Globe Edition" 3).

Charles and Hallam Tennyson tell us of the poet's two encounters with the editions of Malory. The first one was at his father's library (C. Tennyson 32). This book is the one which the poet himself mentioned when he said: "little more than a boy, I first lighted upon Malory" (H. Tennyson 2:128). Yuri Fuwa identifies this book as the R. Wilks edition ("Tennyson's Library" 162). The second encounter was with the Walker and Edwards edition, which seems to have been a gift from Leigh Hunt (Fuwa "Tennyson's Library" 162).

Fuwa, in her essay "Malory's *Morte Darthur* in Tennyson's Library," scrutinizes the copies of Malory which Tennyson possessed and concludes that the R. Wilks edition, rather than the Walker and Edwards edition, "was the main text used by Tennyson in creating the *Idylls of the King*" (168). Furthermore, after pointing out the fact that the R. Wilks edition "was, although mildly, a bowdlerized text" (168), and that those editors who slightly revised the original text of Malory according to the contemporary sense of propriety "unanimously mentioned Tennyson as the poet who had shown the ideal way of treating Arthurian stories" (168), she ends her essay with the following suggestion:

[C]onsidering that his [Tennyson's] work was regarded as a model moralistic interpretation of Arthurian legends, these moral qualities may derive in some way from the text through which Tennyson was introduced to the Arthurian legends. (168)

However, I doubt if the purpose of Tennyson in making some alterations to Malory's original text was to meet public demand for propriety or if the moral qualities in the *Idylls* are caused by the influence that his copies of Malory had upon him. In my opinion Tennyson deleted, as you will see, the past and the

future of Camelot which Malory had depicted minutely from his own work partly because they were not what he intended to describe, and partly because he expected the effects produced by leaving important things unsaid.

In the opening idyll, "The Coming of Arthur," the King appears from the very beginning as an adult figure. In the middle of the poem, Tennyson introduces the birth of Arthur in the conversation between Ulfius, Brastias, Bedivere, and Leodogran. But while Malory, with the intention of proving Arthur's legitimacy, reports in detail how Igraine became pregnant with Arthur (Bk. I Chs. 2-3),³ Tennyson obscures the secret in the nativity of Arthur, and leaves Leodogran debating with himself:

If Arthur were the child of shamefulness,
Or born the son of Gorloïs, after death,
Or Uther's son, and born before his time,
Or whether there were truth in anything
Said by these three . . . (CA 238-42)

Moreover, Tennyson does not tell us how Arthur pulled the magic sword out of the marble stone and thus identified himself as England's rightful king (cf. Malory Bk. I Ch. 5) although it is one of the most popular episodes in the Arthurian legend.

Besides the episodes of Arthur's birth and his legitimacy, Tennyson also blurs the episode of Arthur's incest with his half-sister, King Lot's wife. In *Idylls of the King*, Modred, who is the treacherous nephew born of the incest between Arthur and his half-sister, is called by Arthur "[m]y sister's son — no kin of mine" (G 570). By letting Arthur say to Guinevere: "I was ever virgin save for thee" (G 554), Tennyson obliterates any trace of Arthur's incest with his half-sister from his text. Although "[t]he hinge of the whole legend of the Round Table, from its first glory to its final fall, is the incestuous birth of Mordred from the

connexion of Arthur with his half-sister, unknowing and unknown" (Swinburne 57), Tennyson hides the fact completely from the reader.

The enigmatic birth of Arthur and Modred is not the only episode that Tennyson leaves undeveloped. He also omits the deaths of the main characters. Larry D. Benson explains that in Malory's work, the four major characters, "Arthur, Gawain, Guenevere, and Lancelot all bear part of the guilt for the tragic fall of the Round Table, yet all four are forgiven" in the end (235) and he explains that this makes the end of the work "neither completely tragic nor purely comic" (248). But while Malory elaborates the good ends made by these characters, Tennyson gives no details.

As we can see from the fact that Gawain in *Idylls of the King* is introduced as "Sir Modred's brother, and the child of Lot, / Nor often loyal to his word" (LE 556-57), or as a "reckless and irreverent knight" (HG 853), Tennyson's Gawain does not appear as a major or an ideal knight. Therefore, although Malory regards Gawain highly and reports minutely how he was wounded twice in the war with Lancelot but did not die until the battle began against Modred (Bk. XX Ch. 21-Bk. XXI Ch. 2), Tennyson ignores all such reports and mentions it with only the few words that Gawain was "killed / In Lancelot's war" (PA 30-31). Moreover, while Malory's Gawain warns the King in a dream that if "he fought on the morn, he sholde be slayne" and then the King commands his knights "in ony wyse to take a trefte for a moneth-day wyth sir Mordred" (Bk. XXI Ch. 3), the warning of Tennyson's Gawain is disregarded by Bedivere, who says to Arthur:

Light was Gawain in life, and light in death
Is Gawain, for the ghost is as the man;
And care not thou for dreams from him . . . (PA 56-58)

Far from being a major character, Gawain in *Idylls of the King* is almost forgotten.

Malory shows us the repentance of Guinevere, who says:

'Thorow thys same man [Lancelot] and me hath all thys warre be wrought, and the deth of the moste noblest knyghtes of the worlde; for thorow oure love that we have loved togydir ys my moste noble lorde slayne. . . .' (Bk. XXI Ch. 9)

And he tells us with compassion how the Queen, after departing from Lancelot, accomplishes a good end at an abbey in Almesbury (Bk. XXI Ch. 11). On the other hand, Tennyson refers to the death of the Queen only in the closing lines of "Guinevere":

... and she [Guinevere]
 Still hoping, fearing 'is it yet too late?'
 Dwelt with them [the nuns], till in time their Abbess died.
 Then she, for her good deeds and her pure life,
 And for the power of ministration in her,
 And likewise for the high rank she had borne,
 Was chosen Abbess, there, an Abbess, lived
 For three brief years, and there, an Abbess, past
 To where beyond these voices there is peace. (G 684-92)

As for the death of Lancelot, although Malory tells the reader of the mystic ascension of Lancelot, taken by angels to heaven in Book XXI Chapter 12, Tennyson only hints at it in saying that, after the dolorous death of Elaine, "[s]o groaned Sir Lancelot in remorseful pain, / Not knowing he should die a holy man" (LE 1417-18).

In addition to the death of these major characters, Tennyson

also blurs the description of the death of King Arthur. Malory accentuates the death of Arthur by continuing his story further after Arthur's passing to Avalon and by referring to the testimony of a hermit who saw the "dede corse" of the King (Bk. XXI Ch. 6) and the epitaph for the King which reads: "HIC IACET ARTHURUS, REX QUONDAM REXQUE FUTURUS" (Bk. XXI Ch. 7). By contrast, Tennyson obscures the death of the King firstly by changing the former title of the poem, "Morte d'Arthur," to the vaguer, "The Passing of Arthur," and secondly by leaving Bedivere behind and at a loss:

'He [Arthur] passes to be King among the dead,
And after healing of his grievous wound
He comes again; but — if he come no more — [
(PA 449-51)

As we saw in the above, Tennyson reports neither the mystic death of the main characters nor the enigmatic birth of Arthur and Modred. Why does the poet leave such episodes unwritten, even though all of them are famous and important? It is because those episodes are not what he intended as motifs in his Arthurian cycle. Tennyson says:

"The whole [the general drift of the "Idylls"] . . . is the dream of man coming into practical life and ruined by one sin. Birth is a mystery and death is a mystery, and in the midst lies the tableland of life, and its struggles and performances. It is not the history of one man or of one generation but of a whole cycle of generations." (H. Tennyson 2:127)

What attracted Tennyson was not how King Arthur and his Round Table once flourished and declined, but how the king, knights, and ladies living in Camelot "struggled and performed" during the time of "shadowing Sense at war with Soul" (Q 37).

In other words, Tennyson's interest lay neither in the past nor in the future of the Arthurian realm but "in the midst," where "the tableland of life" lies.

Another unwritten episode to which we have to pay attention is the adulterous love between Lancelot and Guinevere. Malory, too, keeps most of the details of their affair hidden; but Tennyson's effort is more persistent than him. Malory makes explicit the physicality of Lancelot and Guinevere's passion only once when he says that "sir Launcelot wente to bedde with the quene and toke no force of hys hurte honde, but toke hys plesaunce and hys lykyng untyll hit was the dawning of the day" (Bk. XIX Ch. 6).⁴ By contrast, Tennyson entirely omits the scene. Algernon Swinburne and other critics blamed Tennyson for it:

Wishing to make his central figure the noble and perfect symbol of an ideal man, he [Tennyson] has removed not merely the excuse but the explanation of the fatal and tragic loves of Launcelot and Guenevere. (Swinburne 57)

But Tennyson's aim in avoiding the explicit reference to the love of Lancelot and Guinevere was not such a peripheral one as to defend his central figure.

Certainly, Tennyson does not expose the adulterous love between Lancelot and Guinevere to the reader's eyes. But he sets the rumor of their love afloat here and there in the *Idylls*. Their relationship is brought to light in "The Marriage of Geraint" for the first time when "a rumor rose about the Queen, / Touching her guilty love for Lancelot" (MG 24-25). Here, the narrator says:

Though yet there lived no proof, nor yet was heard
The world's loud whisper breaking into storm,

Not less Geraint believed it; . . . (MG 26-28)

In "Balin and Balan" and "Merlin and Vivien" the gossip spreads far and wide because a rumor has been issued by Vivien (MV 151). But the narrator diminishes the credibility of the information by saying that Vivien "lied with ease" (BB 517) and by obscuring what exactly it was that Vivien "heard, watched / And whispered" among the damsels of Guinevere (MV 136-37). There is no authentic proof of the adultery of Lancelot and Guinevere so far at this point.

However, as time passes, it becomes inevitable for the reader to admit the existence of their adulterous love. In "Pelleas and Ettarre," Pelleas, who has long cherished admiration for the knighthood, newly enlists in the Round Table. But, after having been betrayed by Gawain, he becomes dubious of the fidelity of the knightly brotherhood. What drives Pelleas mad is the following conversation with Percivale:

He [Pelleas] woke, and being ware of some one nigh,
Sent hands upon him, as to tear him, crying,
'False! and I held thee pure as Guinevere.'

But Percivale stood near him and replied,
'Am I but false as Guinevere is pure?
Or art thou mazed with dreams? or being one
Of our free-spoken Table hast not heard
That Lancelot' — there he checked himself and paused.
(PE 510-17)

After this brief conversation, Pelleas begins to doubt the purity of Guinevere, the fidelity of the Round Table, and even the truth of Arthur. He shrinks and wails:

'Is the Queen false?' and Percivale was mute.

'Have any of our Round Table held their vows?'
 And Percivale made answer not a word.
 'Is the King true?' . . . (PE 522-25)

Now the reader may have to concede the truth of the love between Lancelot and Guinevere because at this time it is not Vivien, but Percivale whom "Arthur and his knighthood called The Pure" (HG 3) that makes the report. However, interestingly, the reader cannot obtain conclusive evidence of their guilt even at this point. In *Idylls of the King*, no evidence of such kind is accessible to us, because the adulterous love between Lancelot and Guinevere lies in the shadowy past.

Taking notice of these scenes, like Swinburne, readers may think that Tennyson conceals the adultery of Lancelot and Guinevere from them. But, on the other side, the poet ascribes the tragedy in Camelot all to their guilt. For example, while Geraint and Enid in *Mabinogion* leave King Arthur's court merely because Geraint is summoned by his father (Guest 64), Geraint in *Idylls of the King* decides to leave the court because "there fell / A horror on him, lest his gentle wife, / Through that great tenderness for Guinevere, / Had suffered, or should suffer any taint / In nature" (MG 28-32). Although Malory tells the story of Balin and Balan as a piteous story of fratricide triggered by slight misrecognition, which occurred in the prime of the Arthurian court (Bk. II, Ch. 18), Tennyson shifts the story to the middle of his work after the occurrence of the rumor of the intrigue between Lancelot and Guinevere, and adds a new episode in which Balin, who once worshiped the Queen and bore "her own crown-royal upon shield" (BB 196) as a token of his fidelity, becomes distrustful of her and casts "on earth, the shield," drives "his mailed heel athwart the royal crown," and stamps "all into defacement" (BB 531-33). Moreover, in Tennyson's *Idylls*,

Balan misinterprets this scene to mean that some stranger knight "hath slain some brother-knight, / And tramples on the goodly shield to show / His loathing of our Order and the Queen" (BB 540-42) and this misunderstanding triggers the disastrous endings of the two brothers. Far from defending Lancelot and Guinevere, Tennyson censures them for their guilty love by attributing the entire process of the decline of the Arthurian realm to their affair and by casting the shadow of their faults over almost all of the *Idylls*.

As I have discussed, Tennyson made some alterations to his sources. The narrator in each idyll continuously tells the story in the present; how the people living there "struggle and perform." But he sometimes hints at the former love between Lancelot and Guinevere and alludes to the forthcoming death of the main characters. In this manner, Tennyson fulfilled his intention to depict the present of Camelot, having the past and the future anchored to it.

This kind of time which runs on in each idyll is similar to the kind of time which, according to Frank Kermode, flows in "apocalypse." Kermode says:

Apocalypse depends on a concord of imaginatively recorded past and imaginatively predicted future, achieved on behalf of us, who remain 'in the midstest.' (8)

In the same way, Tennyson, like an evangelist, records "the tableland of life" (H. Tennyson 2:127) since, as Arthur often says, "Man's word is God in man" (CA 132, BB 8).⁵ The world of Camelot in Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* always lies "in the midstest." Moreover, the past love of Lancelot and Guinevere and the decline of King Arthur and his Round Table lurk in each idyll. A corresponding feature is also found in "apocalypse." Again Kermode states:

No longer imminent, the End is immanent. So that it is not merely the remnant of time that has eschatological import; the whole of history, and the progress of the individual life, have it also, as a benefaction from the End, now immanent.
(25)

As the immanent End, the dolorous endings of the main characters and Arthur's court are alluded to here and there in the idylls.

So far we have seen how Tennyson depicts the present of Camelot. Each idyll, as a little picture, presents one moment in the realm of King Arthur. By this elaboration, twelve idylls provide a plural present. In addition to this, Tennyson provides seasonal settings so as to unite the plural present into a well-ordered whole. According to Hallam Tennyson, his father developed his idea of encompassing the twelve idylls in the cycle of the year in a manuscript note:

"The Coming of Arthur is on the night of the New Year; when he is wedded 'the world is white with May'; on a summer night the vision of the Holy Grail appears; and the 'Last Tournament' is in the 'yellowing autumntide.' Guinevere flees thro' the mists of autumn, and Arthur's death takes place at midnight in mid-winter. The form of the 'Coming of Arthur' and of the 'Passing' is purposely more archaic than that of the other 'Idylls.'" (H. Tennyson 2:133)

Following the blueprint cited above, Tennyson chooses the proper settings for each idyll. However, the unity is not what he reckoned from the very beginning of his composition. James Knowles testifies in a letter to Hallam Tennyson that after the immense success of his first four *Idylls*, the poet thought:

[I]t was next to impossible now to put the thing properly

together, because he had taken up with a fragmentary mode of treatment instead of the continuous symbolic epic he had meditated in his youth. (quoted in A. Tennyson, *Works* 974n)

However, Knowles continues:

[I]n the end he came to admit that the plan of a series of separate pictures connected by a purpose running through them all, as a thread connects beads, had its merits, and, under the circumstances, had better be tried. (quoted in A. Tennyson, *Works* 974n)

Because Tennyson gave up "the continuous symbolic epic," his work nearly fell into "a fragmentary mode." But by providing the plural present in the twelve idylls and combining them in the cycle of the year, he succeeded in bringing a unity to his work. Tennyson's process of composing *Idylls of the King* was not only to draw "separate pictures" but also to connect them like "a thread connect[ing] beads".

Tennyson tried to leave the past and the future of Camelot unwritten but wrote in a plural present in the idylls. It was the genre of the idyll that enabled Tennyson to depict the present of the Arthurian world. But how does the genre of the idyll affect the work itself? In my opinion, it works so as to make it possible for the poet to overcome his former hesitation in rebuilding Camelot in his work. As we saw at the beginning of this paper, in "The Epic" Tennyson describes how Hall thinks that in his epic "nothing new was said, or else / Something so said 'twas nothing" (E 30-31) and burns it, and how Allen, although he once picked up the eleventh book and kept it with the expectation that "its use will come" (E 42), finally mutters, "like a man ill-used, / 'There now — that's nothing!'" (E 284-85) However, the poem certainly does not end in desperation. The narrator of the

poem further continues:

... where yet in sleep I seemed
 To sail with Arthur under looming shores,
 Point after point; till on to dawn, when dreams
 Begin to feel the truth and stir of day,
 To me, methought, who waited with a crowd,
 There came a bark that, blowing forward, bore
 King Arthur, like a modern gentleman
 Of stateliest port; and all the people cried,
 'Arthur is come again: he cannot die.' (E 288-96)

Both Hall and Allen expected the epic to be of some use; but it turns out to be nothing for them. On the other hand, the narrator of the poem sees Arthur appear "like a modern gentleman" in his dream. If their wavering of mind from hope to despair signifies Tennyson's irresolution in rebuilding Camelot in his work, the narrator's dream brings Tennyson's ideal vision before us. In his dream, the past world of King Arthur and the present world of the narrator coincide.

More than forty years after the publication of his first Arthurian verse, Tennyson realized his ideal in *Idylls of the King*. At the time when he published the first series of the Arthurian poems, he abandoned his epic and determined to bring together his works as idylls. Thus, he was able to depict the Arthurian world vividly rather than to narrate the old Arthurian legend as an old epic. Moreover, he put the seasonal settings athwart all the idylls in order to build a unity for his work, and in the end, this enabled the poet to rebuild Camelot, transcending time and space.

Notes

1. All quotations of Tennyson's poetry are from *The Poems of Tennyson*, ed.

Christopher Ricks (Essex: Longman, 1987). Titles of individual poems are abbreviated as follows: "The Epic," E; "The Coming of Arthur," CA; "The Marriage of Geraint," MG; "Balin and Balan," BB; "Merlin and Vivien," MV; "Lancelot and Elaine," LE; "The Holy Grail," HG; "Pelleas and Ettarre," PE; "Guinevere," G; "The Passing of Arthur," PA; "To the Queen," Q.

2. For detailed information about the history of the publication of Malory's complete works, see Barry Gaines's *Malory: An Anecdotal Bibliography, 1485-1985*, 3-46.
3. All quotations of Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* are from Eugène Vinaver's edition (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1971). In addition, when necessary, the R. Wilks edition and the Walker and Edwards edition have been referred to. For convenience, the book and chapter of Caxton's edition is indicated in parentheses after the quotations.
4. Although Haslewood, the editor of the R. Wilks edition, himself writes in the preface that "every indecent allusion has been carefully expunged" (quoted in Gaines 15), I find this scene of the two lovers' making love in it, too (Part III, Chap.CXXXIV). Therefore, it is implausible that Tennyson, who was familiar with almost every treatment of the Arthurian Legend, did not know this kind of expression of the love between Lancelot and Guinevere.
5. See also LE 143-44, G 470.

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