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**“Intervital” Spaces: The Representation Of Liminal
Epiphany In Tennyson’s Death Poems**

By

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THESIS

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Abstract

The epiphanic moments in Tennyson's symbolic poems about death can be understood as covert or dialogical explorations of a poetics of transition from pragmatic to imaginative experience. In this way Tennysonian representations of the death of culturally symbolic characters juxtapose the prevalent "Victorian" Utilitarian voice of authority and the now marginalized "Romantic" voice of creative vision.

Through the study of the epiphanic motif in Tennyson's poems we discover an inherent death paradigm according to which Tennyson describes his characters' journeys of death through three imaginative spaces: the centre, the liminal and the marginal. The liminal in this paradigm features the epiphanic experience.

The language and imagery of Tennyson's epiphanic moments are characterized by a certain persistent pattern of brightness, activity, wildness and vibrancy. They are liminal spaces in the sense that they are represented as occurring in such intermediate zones as thresholds, shorelines, rivers and roads, or in temporal transitions such as occasions of relocation, departure, or farewell. The exploration of epiphanic experience in these poems, intimately connected as it is with elegiac situations and with the reinterpreted deaths of evidently symbolic figures from legend, myth, or folklore, seems clearly associated with loss or change in the cultural role of poetry and the poetic imagination. It implicitly dramatizes a dissonance between a "Romantic" vision of the significance of ostensibly impractical art and creativity for a culture's health and a perceived pragmatic and rationalist "Victorian" skepticism about those values.

We discern a change in certain constituents of the paradigm with regard to gender. Tennyson consistently assigns one death paradigm to men (centre, movement from liminal to marginal), and another to women (marginal to liminal to centre). This shift in the paradigm differentiates the significance of death for men and for women. In the case of male cultural heroes, Tennyson has chosen adaptations of stories that avoid imposing closure on the possibility that the values these men symbolized might somehow or someday be revived. However, the dying or dead women portrayed as cultural signs are figures Tennyson has chosen from stories that emphasize the finality of their death.

In a study of Tennyson's poems whose subjects are culturally symbolic, concentrating on the study of epiphany can be quite generative of a more complex understanding of the values of his age.

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Note On Text: All Citations of Tennyson's poetry are from Christopher Ricks, The Poems of Tennyson, (London, 1969).

Introduction

In Tennyson's death poems we can distinguish a complex symbolic use of the death motif. This is not surprising, because many critics acknowledge that Tennyson's poetry is densely metaphorical, dialogic or even deliberately evasive. Typically, in fact, Tennyson's motifs of death and life are figurative, suggestive and searching. In lyric 85 in In Memoriam Tennyson refers to the symbolic imaginative possibilities related to death: "So hold I commerce with the dead;/ Or so methinks the dead would say;/ *Or so shall grief with symbols play, / And pining life be fancy-fed* " (93-96; my emphasis). These lines and many others like them in Tennyson's poetry dealing with death or death-like experiences invite and require us not to limit and literalise the implications of death in texts which portray symbolic legendary or mythic characters undergoing evidently symbolic deaths or death-like experiences.

The literary tradition most closely associated with developing the symbolic potential of death for purposes of cultural critique is of course the elegiac. Particularly in pastoral elegy, which ostensibly laments the death of poets, such implications include by generic convention the context of literature itself: issues regarding the nature, responsibility, and reception or neglect of the poetic calling. Tennyson's own pastoral elegy In Memoriam is therefore crucial to any reconsideration of the way the meanings of death and dying are dialogically extended or multiplied in his poetry. This means resisting limited literal or moral interpretations even when the text at first seems to invite that sort of reading. In Memoriam itself, for example, is more than an exploration of personal bereavement or of religious faith tested by the shock of such loss. Likewise, in

his somewhat allegorical “Morte D’Arthur,” Tennyson laments the tragic failure and passing away of a cultural hero in a misguided nation’s hour of need. This moral epic confirms at its most transparent Tennyson’s tendency to depict in the death of plainly symbolic characters the modern world’s loss of earlier values. The apparent nostalgia or sentimentality of such texts can be recontextualized in the light of other poems.

As I will suggest in this thesis, the complex dialogic of Tennyson’s death poems is more interesting and significant than the thematics with which it addressed itself in the first instance to a welcoming Victorian public readership. The underlying lament is for something dead or lost, for the demise of cultural values (whether social, political or literary) that Tennyson considered the modern sensibility of Victorian England would shun or about which he himself felt divided and ambivalent. So the ruse of pastoral or epic convention are just two of the stratagems I will suggest are enlisted by Tennyson to produce polyphony of implication around the subject of death.

The pastoral elegy In Memoriam is especially a proliferation of Tennyson’s polyphony and his symbolic use of death. Tennyson’s poem In Memoriam has been interpreted by many readers, especially in the Victorian age, as a celebration of Christian faith. The critic Robert H. Ross in his essay “The Three Faces of In Memoriam” quotes Queen Victoria as having said after the death of the Prince Consort, “Next to the Bible ‘In Memoriam’ is my comfort” (93). However, though In Memoriam is written in the lyric form, which should supposedly be single voiced, as Elaine Jordan points out, “the writing experienced in the reading is not so single-voiced” (130). She points out that though the Russian critic Bakhtin “contrasted the many voices of the novel with lyric

poetry which, he claimed, was single-voiced and authoritative even when it spoke of doubt [...] the writing experienced in the reading is not so single voiced” (Jordan 30). Critics like E.D.H. Johnson explain this double-voiced nature of Tennyson by saying that its source is Tennyson’s disposition “to disguise his private thoughts under extrinsic layers of meaning” (13). Elton Edward Smith clarifies in his study The Two Voices: A Tennyson Study that Tennyson was always struggling between polar opposites, hearing “two voices”:

A key pattern emerges from his poetry: of the opposites we have been noting, the truth may be neither one [...] Thus the Tennyson poem tends to become a kind of dialogue, a juxtaposition of unlikes which, like modern surrealism, reveals the character of each and both, not statically but as the very tension between powerful and unresolvable opposites. (195)

Throughout his career these “two voices” can be heard and that is why we can never have one final analysis of his work. Smith’s title is of course that of Tennyson’s early poem “The Two Voices,” in which an internal struggle occurs between different kinds of literary calling. I will refer to these “two voices” throughout my thesis as the Utilitarian voice and the Romantic voice.¹ The former is the voice of the public conformist, laureate and bard, and the latter is the voice of the Romantic “wild poet” (lyric 34, 7). Tennyson’s “death poems” symbolically enact the tragic incompatibility of those principles, embedding Victorian cultural issues in the thematic texture of deceptively conventional literary forms and traditional materials.

In Memoriam's critique of Victorian society through elegiac pastoral convention represents one level of the multivocal symbolic possibilities of death. The critic Eleanor Terry Lincoln comments upon the function of pastoral in literature, saying, "the pastoral is not a literature of escape [...] Properly understood pastoral has never avoided the realities of life nor has it been a picture of primitive innocence. The pastoral withdrawal [...] leads to new knowledge and is followed by a return" (3). In light of these words we can understand how Tennyson transforms the immediate subject of his poem, his loss of Hallam, through the conventions of pastoral elegy. In this way the occasion of personal bereavement is extended by generic tradition to current cultural and literary concerns, an opportunity seized by Tennyson to explore urgent Victorian issues. The critic Arthur J. Carr refers to this effect in his essay "Tennyson As A Modern Poet," saying, "The future of art, the nature of society, and the issues of science and religion, take the colors and disposition of his subjective strife. For this reason, the death of Hallam, a personal loss, became a magnet for larger issues" (51). The seasonal structure of In Memoriam itself highlights how with the coming of every season nature is able to rejuvenate life while humanity remains overcome by a symbolic death. In lyric 128 Tennyson identifies many of the troubles of the modern age. Wars are aroused for frivolous reasons; politicians continue to lie; men of religion continue to encourage division; one dictatorial power replaces another; students continue to be moulded into uncreative, constrictive objects; artists continue to rotate within the same dull images and the social circle is still closed. In lyric 106 Tennyson imagines a revitalized bardic poetry able to "Ring in the nobler modes of life" and "the fuller minstrel" (15-20). Elsewhere a more immediate, less

directly public, a literary response is implied in lyric 5: "A use in measur'd language lies;
/ The sad mechanic exercise, Like dull narcotics, numbing pain" (6-8).

By concentrating on the symbolic possibilities of death in Tennyson's poems which deal with death or a death-like experience, I hope to better understand the patterns forming Tennyson's lament. My approach will be to analyze closely and comparatively the representation of death in several major death poems, to clarify the implications of significant patterns of thought and imagery. In particular I will show that the major poems concentrating on death or apparent death are alike in enacting or alluding to unusual states of consciousness as heightened liminal experiences which are extraordinary moments or states of mind poised between "life" and "death". Within these liminal moments or chronotopes, Tennyson strongly implies the possibility of experiencing some sort of "epiphanic" revelation, though this revelation is not always completely liberating or even complete in itself.

It becomes necessary here to distinguish between epiphany and other forms of altered consciousness such as trance, sleep, and delirium. For example, we should not confuse epiphany with mystic revelations. Due to confusion around the definitions of these two terms, many critics have referred to revelatory moments in Tennyson's poetry in terms of mystical experience. The critic Ashton Nichols critiques Basil Willey, Carlisle Moore and Alan Sinfield for falling prey to this assumption. He clarifies that such confused claims are due to Tennyson's private interest in trances throughout his life (131-132). However, whether Tennyson experienced mystical experiences or not is not our issue since we are interested in his poetry, not in his spiritual life. Mysticism is defined in

the OED as “pertaining to the mysteries of faith,” “union with or absorption into the Deity,” “union with the Divine nature by means of ecstatic contemplation” and “spiritual apprehension of truths that are inaccessible to the understanding.” In all these definitions a union takes place with a Deity, Divine nature, the spiritual or faith. However, in Tennyson’s poetry such union is rarely implied and if it does it is stricken with doubt. Furthermore, the object with which he wishes to unite is unclear. Ashton Nichols comments on Tennyson’s revelatory moments, saying, “Mysticism in all of its traditional definitions demands a certainty about the nature of the experience that is always lacking in Tennyson” (134). The critic Martin Bidney adds liminality to this recurring situation in Tennyson’s poetry:

Tennysonian seers are most generally lovers, and they are watchers at the threshold. Whether the watchful quester is a lover of man, of woman, or of God, the appearance of the loved object is experienced as an epiphany granted to a humble suppliant from a higher being [...] The characteristic Tennysonian epiphany is a “liminal” one from limen, Latin for threshold.
(79)

Together, the perspectives of Nichols and Bidney bring us to a more accurate framework than mysticism in characterizing Tennyson’s revelatory moments: liminal epiphany. Ashton Nichols defines epiphany “as powerful emotional intensity (brought) to bear on certain moments of experience” (134). Nichols further clarifies his definition of epiphany: “The tension between the objective, perceptual aspect of an event and its imaginative transformation in the mind of the poet produces a new image that radiates

power and significance” (136). He goes on to clarify that “in such epiphanies the emphasis is placed on the perception of significance, rather than on the interpreted meaning of the significant moment” (135). Nichols clarifies that this indeterminate meaning is characteristic of modern literary epiphany (135). This characteristic of momentary vision stricken with doubt recurs over and over again in Tennyson’s poems which makes the interpretation of Tennyson’s epiphanies a difficult task. This is why concentration on tracing the characteristics of the epiphanic experience (such as those assigned by Bidney) yields more fruitful results. The experience of epiphany is described by Bidney as a transcendent experience “granted to a humble suppliant from a higher being” whether the object of epiphany be “man,” “woman,” or “God” (79). Other objects of epiphany, referred to by Nichols, which recur more often in the poem In Memoriam are nature and language. Nichols lists other possible objects of epiphany in Tennyson’s poetry:

For Tennyson, such elevations of the ordinary through a powerful act of mind are not always restricted to natural scenes [...] words themselves had an incantatory power over him. (139)

In his Poetics of Epiphany Nichols lists the three criteria for epiphany: “expansiveness,” “atemporality” and “mysteriousness” (qtd in Bidney 2). Bidney however disregards the element of “atemporality,” replacing it with “intensity” (2). The reason Bidney gives for this preference is quite convincing since epiphanies do not necessarily “abolish time [but] seem to mean far more than [their] limitedness in time” and are hence better termed as “expansive”(2). Hence, Bidney defines epiphany as

“enigmatic but vivid instants - impulses of dreamlike power that, brief as they may be, resonate with a riddling intensity” (1). Furthermore, epiphanic moments imply “mystery” because they “indicate the inexplicability at the heart of the epiphanic experience” we cannot understand completely why, where or when they happen (Bidney 2). After all, Nichols describes the epiphanic experience as “human escape from the ordinary bounds of human thought” (141). Furthermore, Bidney adds the criterion of “intensity” because epiphany is not just any moment but a charged moment (2). This charged nature of the epiphanic experience is best embodied in the unique imagery which distinguishes Tennysonian epiphany indicated by Bidney as “rolling, wheeling motions” and “fire-flowers” which are indicated by “flashing” and “bright” imagery (78). The characteristic feature of these fire flowers is that “they are blends of flame and air, signifying what is higher” (Bidney 81).

Bidney further argues that Tennyson’s epiphanies are governed by a “liminality concept” (79). By “liminality” Bidney means: “an experience of thresholdness, an intense moment felt to be on the borderline between the quotidian and the overpoweringly ‘Other,’ between natural and awesomely supernal, or (most commonly in Tennyson’s poems) between life and what seems to be death” (79). This “liminality” aspect along with “the blends of flame and fire” can be traced in the epiphanic experiences dealt with in this study (Bidney 81). Bidney then distinguishes between the “liminality” and “penultimacy”(79). Bidney quotes critics such as Fredemen who criticize Tennyson’s major dramatic moments because they end before a definitive theological truth can be shown (qtd in Bidney 79). However, Bidney argues “explicit revelations of supposed

theological truth are not the main point [...] Tennyson's epiphanies [...] are themselves his imaginative ultimates" (79). In fact this doubtful end, which Tennyson always tends to favour, is exactly what makes him modern and Victorian. Nichols comments on this indefiniteness saying, "this unwillingness to make a final statement [...] represents that which is most modern in Tennyson's poetry: that is, his willingness to suspend judgement in the face of experience, allowing significance to emerge out of events, rather than imposing significance upon them" (146).

By drawing on this liminal aspect we can assume that Tennyson's epiphanies are anchored in a borderline space oscillating at times between life and death, faith and doubt, and always end on a note of doubt. Tennyson's concealment of ideas in dialogical ambiguity and undecidability is due, I believe, to his preference for this liminal zone. In his essay "Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel" Bakhtin refers to the "chronotope of threshold" describing it in terms that are useful to our analysis:

The word 'threshold' itself has a metaphorical meaning in everyday usage (together with its literal meaning), and is connected with the breaking point of a life, the moment of crisis, the decision that changes a life (or the indecisiveness that fails to change a life, the fear to step over the threshold). (248)

Tennyson prefers to situate himself midway between life and death, past and present, the Romantic "wild Poet" referred to in *In Memoriam* and the Victorian conformist (lyric 34, 7). In this space he can resist indirectly the official Victorian ideology and yet leave space for undecidability in relation to a possible alternative

intention. This motif of possible liminal epiphany, and the kind of transcendent knowledge it might impart in the face of loss and death, seems implicitly related to a Romantic theory of poetic imagination, and hence to writing and artistic activity, including Tennyson's own writing. There are important cultural and artistic implications that Tennyson is apparently reluctant to profess openly in defiance of the unsympathetic pragmatism of his Victorian audience. Alan Sinfield explains Tennyson's interest in the marginal along these same terms:

In Tennyson's practice, the marginalized activity of analysing states of mind occurs repeatedly within a move to a geographical periphery where he locates kinds of experience not valued at the centre [...] At the margins of English influence might still be found, it was felt, truer imaginative vision -a way of life not yet under the sway of the dominant ideology [...] This centre/margins structure is used by Tennyson repeatedly as a way of handling the tensions within current conceptions of politics and poetry.

(Alfred Tennyson, 39-41)

Sinfield considers this ruse as a downfall of Tennyson and as an example of his inability to deal with Utilitarianism's negative views of poetry in his age. Ultimately though, as Sinfield argues, "Tennyson's persistence with his elegies witnesses to his intuition that this theme and manner answer very well to the difficulties and objectives of the mid-nineteenth century poet [that is] negotiating a role for poetry in a developing bourgeois hegemony, addressed typically by constructing poetry as a superior mode of language" (113). Hence, one can raise the argument that in In Memoriam we get a sense that

Tennyson is consciously blurring strict binary oppositional terms such as life and death, science and poetry and Utilitarian and Romantic. In a sense he breaks down classificatory order. What is so ironical about this revolutionary challenge of binaries is that, according to Armstrong, who is quoted by Sinfield, it was done through a seemingly Utilitarian attitude that “poetry should concentrate on the study of particular states of mind” (quoted in Alfred Tennyson, 18). Though Sinfield deduces that Tennyson by concentrating on special states of mind is actually subsuming to the values of Utilitarianism, which is against Shelley’s notion of conjunction, I believe Shelley’s description of the poet in The Defence as “the unacknowledged legislators of the world” refutes Sinfield’s point here (Shelley 36). Though poets are forced to dwell in the “unacknowledged” margins they still have the power to legislate, create and control. This is why Elton Edward Smith describes the issue of the artist’s position in society according to Tennyson in quite useful terms: “The artist is neither an aesthete betrayed into social conscience nor a prophet of Victorian progress who occasionally doubts his own message. He is a man in whose life and verse the one and the many struggle, and continue to struggle” (53). However, towards the end of the poem Tennyson restores order by asserting that he has overcome his doubt. However, this restored order is not theologically conventional or final, since he evasively refers in the last line of In Memoriam to his God as “one far-off divine event” (503).

Hence, from the above inner struggle within Tennyson (between the Utilitarian dominant discourse and the marginalized Romantic discourse) springs the culturally symbolic possibilities of epiphany. Bakhtin points to the symbolic possibilities of liminal

epiphany or the “chronotope of *threshold*”: “In literature, the chronotope of the threshold is always metaphorical and symbolic, sometimes openly but more often implicitly” (248). Bakhtin’s thought is also associated, of course, with dialogism and in particular with the way in which dominant or “official” culture (the monologic) is balanced by the operation of other voices and values. In lyrics, 21, and 77 of In Memoriam Tennyson anticipates the reactions of utilitarian, materialistic Victorians to his poem. In lyric 21 he imagines three possible obtuse responses to his poem. The first reader represents the gender notions of Victorians, who will consider the poet’s expression of lamentation a weakness unsuitable for men. The second reader represents utilitarianism since he thinks Tennyson writes to gain fame. The third reader represents materialism since he finds Tennyson’s expression of emotions meaningless in an age where science should have the upper hand over emotion. In lyric 77 the utilitarianism of such readers is mocked by the suggestion that they may use the papers of his poesy to “bind a book,” “line a box” or “curl a maiden’s locks” (6-7).

Hence through the coming chapters my goal will be to discern the relation of death, my main subject of study, to several supplementary topics. The focal point will always be liminal epiphanic moments. In chapter 1 my major goal will be to discern the distinguishing characteristics of the liminal epiphanic experience in order to trace it in the following chapters. The second facet of my study, which arises more importantly in chapters 2 and 3, is the symbolic use of death as a cultural critique of issues related to the subjects of poetry and literature. However, this cultural critique is often dialogically expressed, oscillating between Romantic and Utilitarian perspectives. Furthermore, in

chapters 2 and 3 we begin to discern a gender difference: one death paradigm for males as cultural heroes and another for females as cultural signs.

I feel that Tennyson never reached a state of peace or understanding with death. Even in “Crossing the Bar” he still only “hopes” to meet his pilot and is not absolutely sure he will (15). By concentrating on epiphany as a motif it becomes more important to discern unifying patterns in Tennyson’s work rather than dividing it into biographical stages. Furthermore, studying the epiphanic motif opens the venue for discerning contradictory roles played by the poet: Romantic, Utilitarian. Moreover, contradictory attitudes towards legendary women and men’s deaths become more discernible.

My thesis will begin with a chapter of analysis of In Memoriam because in it we can trace the different altered states of consciousness in comparison to epiphany, which crystallizes this notion and the constituents that construct it. In the following chapter I will deal with famous poems about the death of cultural heroes notably “Tithonus” and “Morte D’Arthur”. In a third chapter I will study what happens when the death figure is a woman, as in “The Lady of Shalott” and “Oenone.” In addition to the traditional approach of comparative analysis my approach will be informed at various points by Bakhtin’s notions of dialogism and chronotope, and, in the chapter on women’s death or death-like states, by feminism.

Endnotes

¹ In this thesis I will use the term “Romantic” in the rather general accepted sense by which it has become customary to refer to the concept and possible cultural role of the literary imagination articulated by the English poets of the early nineteenth century, notably Shelley. Henry Remak quotes Rene Wellek who has described a critical consensus that the term connotes “the implication of the imagination, symbol, myth, and organic nature, and see it as a part of the great endeavor to overcome the split between subject and object, the self and the world, the conscious and the unconscious”(qtd. in Eichner, 490). Shelley in particular privileged poets as “unacknowledged legislators,” assigning their work a special but indirect cultural influence and restorative value (Shelley 36). I am suggesting that Tennyson was in sympathy with such a view of the nature and significance of poetic activity, and yet, at the same time, aware of its being out of favour in the dominant ideologies of Victorian England. Of these resistant or rival ideologies, it is the one I shall call “Utilitarian” that Tennyson most commonly places in dialogical relation with Romanticism. According to its chief exponents, Jeremy Bentham and James Mill, the rationalist social and economic principle of “general utility” provided “the greatest happiness for the greatest number”(qtd. in Levine 233). Modeled on science, this attitude (Utilitarianism) evidently prevailed widely in Victorian England: “Such was the spirit of their age and country” (Halvey 233). Alan Sinfield backs the fact that Utilitarianism was the prevalent discourse of Tennyson’s age saying that Shelley in his Defence of Poetry “ identified correctly the dominant movement of his time. He [Shelley] argued that utilitarianism, political economy and reliance upon machinery were

destroying both imaginative and political freedom” (qtd. in Alfred Tennyson, 14). The utilitarian heartlessness, and hostility to imagination is extensively mocked in Dicken’s novel Hard Times. In the poem “Ulysses,” Tennyson explicitly presents Telemachus as a Victorian utilitarian unimaginatively attentive to “the useful and the good” (“Ulysses” 38). Ulysses on the other hand is the Romantic figure whose “spirit yearn(s) in desire / To follow knowledge like a sinking star, / Beyond the utmost bound of human thought” (“Ulysses” 30-32).

Chapter 1: In Memoriam and the “intervital” Chronotope

Martin Bidney characterizes the three great epiphanic moments of Tennyson’s In Memoriam as “a prophecy, a memory, and a prayer” (86). However, it can instead be argued that though the possibly epiphanic moments in In Memoriam are few, the liminality of such experiences is the distinguishing feature of their representation by Tennyson. Bidney acknowledges that “The characteristic Tennysonian epiphany is a ‘liminal’ one” (79). Indeed, phrases expressing the liminal are scattered throughout the poem, such as “marge to marge,” “the skirts of self,” “on the low dark verge of life,” “the great world’s altar stairs,” “Behind the veil, behind the veil,” “doubtful shore,” “breaking morn,” “shadowy thoroughfares of thought,” “lattice,” “dolorous strait,” “the dawn” and “The twilight of eternal day” (lyric 12, 12; lyric 47, 3; lyric 50, 15; lyric 55, 15; lyric 56, 28; lyric 61, 9; lyric 68, 8; lyric 70, 8; lyric 70, 15; lyric 84, 39; lyric 95, 61; lyric 50, 16). The shared feature of all these images is that they signify conditions of separation or demarcate boundaries, including of course the ultimate one, between life and death. This quality is expressly captured in Tennyson’s coinage “intervital” in lyric 43, denoting a time or place between one life and another. More important, however, is that each also implies potentiality for transition, for crossing the space or boundary, for achieving or restoring contact across the divide. This undercurrent in In Memoriam signals a distinctive concern to pursue or at least explore that possibility or desire, even if it offends reason.

Tennyson’s representation of these liminal positions is accompanied by other metaphorical patterns and imagery that likewise simultaneously affirm and obscure the

means by which the ordinary limits of experience might or might not be imaginatively transcended or subverted, at least temporarily. These motifs correspond closely to what Bidney identifies as “epiphanies” (1). By tracing the fragmentary evolution of this motif throughout the poem, partly in the context of Mikhail Bakhtin’s suggestive concept of “chronotope,” we can better understand the climatic epiphanic moment of In Memoriam in lyric 95 (Bakhtin 84). That is why this chapter will deal with the distinctive generic characteristics of Tennyson’s liminal epiphany and concentrate on how it is distinguished from other forms of altered consciousness such as, negative capability (as in lyrics 2, 12 and 16, and 130); sleep (as in lyrics 68, 69, 70 and 71); dream vision (as in lyric 103); mysticism (as in lyric 44) and delirium (as in lyric 16). I will use the term liminal epiphany to refer to the epiphanic moment. In Tennyson’s case especially this term is related to Bakhtin’s term “chronotope of the threshold” in “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes toward a Historical Poetics” (248). The metaphorical meaning of this term coined by Bakhtin is connected with “the breaking point of a life, the moment of crisis” or “the decision that changes a life” which further relates it to Tennyson’s use of liminal epiphany (248). However, we must remind ourselves here that in In Memoriam this decision is never completed because the poetic moment’s possible significance is invariably muted or overcome by doubt. Polarities meet in a flash but instantly divide.

I would like to argue further that this “intervital” space is in most instances, in one way or another, connected to Romantic poetry and the literary imagination. However, Tennyson’s dialogism and the manner with which he blends discourses together (as when

he uses the discourse of religion in lyric 55 "I stretch lame hands of faith, and grope, / [...] To what I feel is Lord of all" to refer to a poetic epiphanic moment he is struggling to achieve) sometimes makes it difficult for readers to discern this relation (17-19). Moreover, there is the component of struggle that thwarts and undermines the fulfillment of epiphany here. Tennyson's attitude towards epiphany itself is divided. Poetry is sometimes the epiphanic experience itself or at other times the source of instigation that allows the epiphany to take place, or elsewhere even an indefinable source of fearful power. For example, in lyric 13 Tennyson refers to his fanciful desire, "to rise on wing" through epiphany (17).

In lyric 49 Tennyson refers to epiphanies described as "random influences" that merely "glance" (2). He also states possible sources for this "random influence" such as "art," "nature" and "schools" (1). Tennyson's reference to "art", "nature" and "schools" as "random influences" that "glance" echoes the imagery pattern that Bidney assigns to epiphanies. Bidney defines epiphany as "expansive," "mysterious" and "intense" moments that in Tennyson's case become "enkindled thoughts quickened to wizard lightning-fire" (89).

In lyric 15 he refers to epiphany as a state of "wild unrest" which onward drags his "labouring breast" (15-18). In lyric 34 epiphany becomes the dictate of the "wild poet" and "lurks" within (6-7). In this latter lyric Tennyson nervously refers to epiphany as "fantastic beauty; such as lurks/ in some wild Poet, when he works/ without" "conscience" and "aim" (6-8).

Illustrative Instances of Types and Roles of Epiphany:

Lyric 34 delineates the general characteristics of Tennyson's liminal epiphany and its relation to poetry and, more ambiguously, to conventional morality and belief. It describes epiphany as "fantastic beauty; such as lurks. / In some wild Poet; when he works/Without a conscience or an aim" (6-8). In these lines we can discern two of the three characteristics of epiphany defined by Martin Bidney "intensity" and "mysteriousness"(3). Bidney defines literary epiphany as, "a moment that is felt to be expansive, mysterious, and intense" (3). The words "fantastic" and "wild" foreground the "intensity" of the epiphanic experience. The word "lurks" foregrounds the mysteriousness of this experience since we can never completely understand where, when and why these furtive moments happen. Also, in this lyric a connection is forged between the "wild poet" and "This round of green, this orb of flame" (5-7). This underlines Ashton Nichols's reference to Tennyson's objects of epiphany being "natural scenes" as well as "words" (139). In the second stanza of this lyric the discourse of "wild poetry" pervades as he refers to the "Fantastic beauty" - imagination - of poetry "Without a conscience or an aim" (6-8). These lines seem to echo part of the beliefs of a Romantic philosophical legacy. The amorality is Shelleyan- virtue and faith are distinct from art and imagination, and are not the immediate aim of creative activity. Spontaneity is also a Romantic credo, as influentially articulated by Wordsworth in his "Preface to the Lyrical Ballads", which affirms the "spontaneity" of poetry, and stands in contrast to the Utilitarian doctrine that everything must be morally or practically useful. In the next stanza the discourse of Victorian morality and rationalism rises as reservations about

creating poetry "spontaneously" alone are dwelt upon. If Romanticism is a delusion, making choices and having patience is useless and scarcely preferable to suicidal death (falling "head- foremost" to extinguish thinking as soon as possible) within the jaws of the serpent (15). A sinister effect in this third stanza is the increase of the sound "s" to indicate the hissing of the serpent: "sink," "peace," "serpent," "draws," "jaws," "darkness" and "cease" (13-16). Here the death motif, which forms the apex of the epiphanic triangular paradigm, is discernable. The other two points of the triangle are poetry and liminality. Here the text underlines a liminal moment of decision indicated in the phrase "A little patience *ere I die*" (12; my emphasis). It is these moments of "intervitality" between polar opposites that instigate Tennyson's epiphanic imagination. Death is introduced through the visual image of the poetic bird falling into the jaws of the deathly serpent.

Dialogism in this lyric makes it difficult to indicate Tennyson's attitude towards this death wish. On the one hand, he describes the poetic bird as sinking "to peace" in "vacant darkness and to cease" which seems desirable as a peaceful end to a "wild poet's" troubles. It is a rather liminal space, as I might add, since this "vacant darkness" seems rather endless and limitless. We are almost inevitably reminded here of the Romantic death-wish strophe of Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale": "Now more than ever seems it rich to die, / To cease upon the midnight with no pain" (John Keats 55-56). However, the image of a "charming serpent" drawing a bird in its "jaws" is rather fearful because it alludes to the danger of hypnotic allurements by a devouring serpent (14-15). Through this dialogism of discourses we can trace the struggle within Tennyson between

the Romantic “wild poet” vision of poetry and Utilitarian principles of probity and purpose. However, it is worthy to note that his attempt to argue on the side of Victorian morality is itself stricken with equivocation: “My own *dim* life *should* teach me this” (1; my emphasis). Two words here call our attention to dissatisfaction with the dominant Victorian discourse. “Dim” connotes unclarity, dismalness, dullness and insignificance, and “should” expresses duty or obligation to believe something contradictory to expectation. In this lyric we can trace an example of how when a poet plays two contrasting roles, irresponsible “wild poet” and merely dutiful public conformist, epiphanic patterns portray the harmony or lack of harmony within and between these roles (Bidney 199). In this case, there is a definite disharmony, which leads to the interior conflict within the poet throughout the poem clearly delineated in his oscillation between opposing stances and his constant attempt to attain a liminal position between them.

Lyric 88 is again an example of how the liminal is related to the poetic. Tennyson refers to the discourse of Romantic “wild poet” once more, indicated this time by the reference to the singing (poetry) of the “Wild bird” (1). This bird of Romantic philosophy’s creation succeeds to “warble liquid sweet” for elongated periods of time (1). We can discern the repetition of the “r” sound which echoes the warbling of the bird: “bird,” “warble,” “Rings,” “through,” “radiate,” “spirits” (1-6). Furthermore, the enchanting beauty of the warbling and its purity are foregrounded by its description as being “liquid sweet/Rings Eden through” (1-2). Also, by describing it with words like “Rings Eden through” and “radiate” the text highlights the strength of this voice as it transcends worldly boundaries (2-5). Another intriguing aspect of this bird is that even if

it is nearing its death ("darkening leaf") or amidst the deepest grief it sustains the secret joy of creating song and hence presumably knows "where the senses mix [...] where the passions meet" (3-6). This is why he envies this "Wild bird" which sings so naturally while his own only "glory" is a transitory "flash along the chords" (11-12). He seeks help finding this liminal zone of mixing and meeting which is the medium of epiphany, saying, "O tell me where the senses mix, / O tell me where the passions meet," (3-4). However, Tennyson refers to his struggle to attain the epiphanic moment referring to his instrument of poetic creation ("my harp") saying, "I cannot all command the strings" (9-10). Here we notice that unlike the "wild poet" and "wild bird" who can obtain their inspiration through natural means, Tennyson stresses how he is no longer capable of sustaining this state.

Though lyric 10 does not contain an epiphany it begins with negative capability and ends with a wish for an active liminal burial, or the liminality, which Tennyson invites Victorian culture to embrace. The lyric begins by imaginatively describing the journey of Hallam's body to England. The poet imaginatively leaves his body and describes how he sees the "keel," "the cabin-window," and "the sailor at the wheel" (1-4). Then his critique of Victorian habitual conformity begins through his mockery of burial rituals that necessitate that Hallam's body be brought back to England to be buried: "Our home-bred fancies: O to us / The fools of habit, sweeter seems" (11-12). Tennyson here questions the significance behind these rituals. After that he goes on to prefer a liminal burial describing it in terms similar to the imagery he uses to describe the epiphanic experience with regards to activity and motion "roaring wells," "toss with

tangle and with shells”(17- 20). A wish to break with traditionality is expressed in Tennyson’s preference for a liminal burial, which leaves the body to toss and tangle at the bottom of the sea, rather than a traditional burial. Hence, two states of death are juxtaposed here: the traditional “home-bred” burial “beneath the clover sod,” and the untraditional burial in the “fathom-deep in brine” where he would “toss with tangle and with shells” (11-20). These two deaths correspond to the two different discourses struggling within Tennyson: the traditional and the untraditional, the Victorian and the Romantic. Tennyson states that only “the fools of habit” would prefer the traditional burial. However, though he domesticates and even effeminates the traditional burial referring to it as a “home-bred” fancy, he knows he cannot escape it as Hallam in the end will be buried in the traditional manner (11).

Non-Epiphanic States of Mind:

We can describe Tennyson’s exploration of epiphany in In Memoriam as an evolutionary process stirred by an outside source but ultimately deriving from within the poet. Ashton Nichols refers to a distinguishing feature of epiphany, saying it is “a revelatory experience grounded in this world, a revelation that originates not in an external source, but in the mind of the poet” (135). Though “revelatory experience” grounded in an external source might have some of the primary components of epiphany but for the purposes of this study might better be termed negative capability than epiphany (Nichols 135). For example lyrics 2, 12, 16, 129 and 130 may hence be

considered examples of negative capability in that they are grounded in an external source rather than the mind of the poet.

The last stanza of lyric 2 is an example of negative capability, "I seem to fail from out my blood / And grow incorporate into thee" (15-16). Instead of incorporating the Yew tree with its "sullen" nature and "hardihood" in his mind he wishes to leave his body and mind and join it (13-14). Furthermore, we do not see in this experience, which is more similar to negative capability than epiphany, any "flashing" revelation. Even though truly revelatory moments elsewhere are short and stricken with doubt they are essential components of its liminal epiphanies. Though the criterion of "intensity" exists in Lyric 2 to some degree as Tennyson wishes to leave his body and unite with the tree, nothing is mysterious about the moment nor does it expand the limitedness of time. Liminality is also absent in Tennyson's experience here because he wishes to leap from one state to another instead of interminably experiencing both states at the same time or occupying an in-between space.

Lyric 12 does not deal with an epiphanic state either. Though he lingers in the liminal space of the marge, he escapes his body again to imitate the dove. We can hence describe his mental experience here as negative capability rather than epiphany. Instead of incorporating the outside elements of the outside world in his imagination and pondering upon them to reach a degree of revelation he leaves behind his "mortal [...] weight of nerves" or his body and his mind (6-7). Though the element of circling which Martin Bidney refers to as a distinguishing feature of epiphany is found in the lyric, we

cannot consider it an epiphanic moment for the above mentioned reasons and because it also lacks the mysteriousness and expansiveness of epiphanic moments.

Lyric 16 is another example of negative capability. In this lyric Tennyson refers to himself as an "unhappy bark" (12). Instead of incorporating the ship in his mind and attempting to meet it in a liminal zone, he compares his shock-stricken grievous state to a ship, which hits a craggy shelf and sinks. Verbs like "staggers" and "stunn'd" are used to describe his paralysed confused state, which does not seem related in any way to the overwhelming yet revelatory state he represents when he describes epiphany (14-15). When he describes an epiphanic experience there is a degree of achievement arrived at though it is short and stricken with doubt. Here we do not see Tennyson reaching any achievement. When we come to the last stanza in the poem we realize he is describing delirium rather than epiphany. Though it is also an altered state of mind, it is quite different from epiphany. It is a state where mingling of ideas takes place but of "false and true" "without a plan?" (19-20). No expansive meaning challenging the limitedness of time evolves.

Tennyson again occasionally resorts to negative capability; lyrics 129 and 130 are examples. Hence, in relation to form he comes back full circle to the imaginative poetic perspective he began with. In lyric 129 Tennyson claims that through his "dream" or poetry he "mingles" the whole world with his dead friend (11-12). Hence he claims here that he mixes the whole world with Hallam when in reality throughout the poem he has stood on the threshold of the discourses of the Romantic "wild poet" and the

Utilitarian and allowed them to trouble one another but never to mix totally. He also states clearly here that this poem is not merely an elegy but explores other issues important to him. Hallam the indefinite "other" whom Tennyson always attempts to mingle with throughout his poem is mixed freely with all that worries him. This "other" in the text is sometimes Hallam, God or Poetic inspiration. In this lyric this "other" is referred to as "known and unknown; human, divine" (5). We can thus claim that the "other" in Tennyson's poem invites polyphonic possibilities. Though in later lines he refers to it in human terms as "Sweet human hand and lips and eye," the fact that he refers to it as both "human" and "divine" troubles any single interpretation (5-6). Furthermore, Hallam was not only a friend to Tennyson but was also an intellectual colleague whose views Tennyson trusted deeply. Tennyson refers to the intellectual literary aspect of their relationship together when he refers in poem 89 to how they read the Tuscan poets together.

In lyric 130 Tennyson again diffuses the voice and image of the "other" into nature "air," "sun," "waters" and "star and flowers" (1-5). The signification indicated by the object of desire or "other" becomes further complicated as Tennyson addresses it saying, "Though mixed with God and Nature thou" (11). Hence, the polyphony of meanings Tennyson has been expressing in relation to the "other" is a simplified solution Tennyson resorts to at the end of his poem though it is not what he was working towards throughout the poem. The meeting of discourses in the liminal sphere is quite different from their mixing. Furthermore, this mixing is not possible since each discourse chooses to keep its identity and does not completely lose it. Alan Sinfield justifies the preference

for vagueness in this poem and other poems, which express, “the same basic trends in Tennyson’s thinking-his reliance upon subjective experience and ultimately the vision for his most deeply felt beliefs” (The Language of Tennyson’s In Memoriam 71). Sinfield clarifies that “To express honestly and credibly the essence of such other-worldly experience must be an extremely difficult task, and vagueness can be very helpful” (The Language of Tennyson’s In Memoriam 70). Hence for Tennyson, there is no absolute truth but polyphony of possible truths. Yet, in lyrics 129,130 and 131 Tennyson sets aside his polyphony of interpretations and forces himself to state an unconvincing happy resolution he has been trying to avoid throughout the poem. We can therefore say that for the liminal epiphanic moment to take place revelation has to be grounded in the mind of the poet and should not be forced.

We can refer to lyric 55 as a thwarted epiphany. In this lyric Tennyson gropes desperately to reach liminal epiphany and fails because his attempts are too desperate. Hence, though it is an example of a liminal zone it is essentially a platitude and unfulfilled. Bidney refers to the importance of liminality in Tennyson’s epiphanic experience, saying, “the elevating but foreboding sense of thresholdness or liminality [...] provides the spiritual frame for the heightened moment” (78). Some of the lyrics in In Memoriam introduce this element and foreground it while lacking the other aspects of epiphany. Liminality is highlighted in lyric 55. Here Tennyson is trapped in a space of darkness and void on “the great world’s altar- stairs” (15). Though the epiphanic moment does not occur here Tennyson is intrigued by the liminal space of a stairway. His struggle

to achieve the epiphanic moment is evident here though he refers to it using the discourse of religion. Tennyson often changes the object of his desire, the "other" he is trying to unite with throughout the poem. This correlates to the dialogism of three discourses throughout the poem. At times he refers to it as God, Hallam, or an undefined vision or event. What is interesting in lyric 55 is the struggle he undergoes to reach this moment or "divine event" which he later refers to in the epilogue (143). Whether this "divine event" is God or not is what is questioned. He describes how he with "lame hands" tries to "stretch" and "grope" to reach towards the object of his desire, which he ironically doubts (17). He can only "feel" and "faintly trust" in it (19-20). In the poem he first refers to the object of his desire as "God" then "Lord of all," then "the larger hope" (5-20). He hence gradually takes away the concreteness related to this term as doubt over what he actually is seeking increases. The imagery of light and flashes related to epiphany are absent but he still attempts to struggle through tactile attempts to achieve his three-fold object of desire. His struggle is what makes him fail; when he achieves liminal epiphany in lyric 95 there is no struggle. Tennyson outlines, in lyric 50, liminal zones where he can possibly unite with his object of desire. Again here he does not directly name this object of desire. He refers to the medium where he can possibly encounter it the "low dark verge of life" and "The twilight of eternal day" (15-16).

Lyrics 68, 69, 70 and 71 all deal with the liminal altered state of consciousness of sleep and how it is similar to the epiphanic moment. Dreaming is an "intervital" state where the poet can mentally experience union with his object of desire. However, we tend to find that the revelations made in sleep are easier to achieve because sleep is a

liminal state of unconsciousness where Tennyson can suspend Victorian morality and allow the repressed Romantic discourse to rise. In lyric 68 Tennyson refers to the brevity of the epiphanic experience which takes place during sleep, saying, "But ere the lark hath left the lea/ I wake" (13-14). We notice the bird imagery again here, which Tennyson often uses to invoke associatively the discourse of Romantic poetry. However, doubt strikes once more before the epiphanic experience is completed and dismisses the significance of the epiphanic moment by referring to sleep as "foolish" (16). However, in lyric 69 he goes on to describe the epiphanic experience anyway, discrediting his earlier dismissal. In this lyric the discourse of Romantic poetry appears once more as he assumes the role of the poet prophet. This is clear in the manner with which he binds his brow with a crown. This hence connects him to Christ who wore a crown of thorns as he was crucified and met with many "scoffs" and "scorns" as he was spreading his message (9). This crown of thorns though is described to be transformed "into leaf" by an "angel of the night" which he meets (14-18). This "angel" is another reference to Tennyson's object of desire, which constantly shifts shape. The transformation of the thorns to leaves though referred to doubtfully can be seen as a reference to poetic inspiration. Yet again, as always, the significance of this inspiration is stricken with doubt because "The words were hard to understand" (20). In lyrics 70 and 71 Tennyson continues to describe the difficulty he experiences in achieving his ultimate aim which is "to paint" this epiphanic moment (2). The atmosphere is hazy full of "shadowy," "half-alive," "lazy-lengths" (8-12). The liminality of this situation is highlighted by the reference to a "lattice" on the soul, which allows the poet to vaguely envision his object of desire (15). The "wizard

music" which he hears before the "fair face" or the object of his desire appears may be interpreted as the voice of inspired artistic creativity (14-16). Moreover, the epiphanic aspects of "flashing" and circular "roll" motions appear in relation to the "wizard music". In lyric 71 Tennyson further clarifies how the liminality of sleep is the aspect which facilitates epiphany, unlike other altered states of consciousness such as "trance" and "madness" (1-2). Sleep creates or "forge(s)" the "intervital" zone where past and present can meet (2).

Once more, in lyric 103 the "threshold" of sleep is represented as initiating contact with one's object of desire through an allegorical dream vision. Tennyson resorts here to the genre of dream vision in order to sustain a more detailed thematic exploration than would be possible in recording a real dream or an epiphany. The actual dreams or the epiphanies in In Memoriam are always consumed with doubt. Hence lyric 103 can usefully be seen as paradigm of what he would most like an epiphany to be, an ideal epiphanic image. The medium which actuates this for him is poetry, as he is in a hall where "harp and carol rang" (9). He also refers clearly here to a feminine source of inspiration; the muses. He stands surrounded by the muses who sing to his object of desire, which remains veiled to him. He is then summoned to sea and is led by the muses to a boat. This boat here could be indicative of the mental journey he is about to undertake. The poetic songs of war, history and astronomy sung by the muses instigate this transformation, which overcomes him. This highlights the transformational power of poetry. However, when he reaches the ship, which carries the object of his desire he forsakes the accompanying muses and does not answer their calls. Oddly, when he

reaches the object of his search he discards his enabling source of inspiration and further effeminates it. Women here are portrayed within the boundaries of the stereotypical and then discarded. This anticipates attitudes towards women's death to be clarified in a later chapter. Tennyson does not seem to have a place in heaven, Elysium or Avalon for women. It is only the "he" or object of his desire, not the poet, who invites them to come along (50). The ship begins to spew out poetry from its shroud like sails as they all sail towards a final destination "a crimson cloud" (55).

The Climatic epiphany of Lyric 95:

Lyric 95 can be considered to dramatize the ultimate Tennysonian epiphanic experience because it brings together all the previous fragmented elements of epiphany and is attained through a liminal semi-conscious state, not through sleep (a liminal unconscious state). The lyrics directly preceding the climatic epiphanic moment in poem ninety-five "record a version of the expectation that will be fulfilled in the ninety-fifth" (Nichols, 141). In lyric 94 Tennyson states his actual conditions for union with the dead: "the spiritual can be linked to the living through a purely human agency - imagination" (Nichols, 142). This confirms our assumption that the epiphanic experience is a liminal medium for Tennyson and is empirically related to poetic imagination, and Tennyson's dialogism is a further indication of this. We can argue that lyric 95 is the pivotal lyric, and its strange central experience is crucial to an understanding of the intense interior drama of the whole sequence. Nichols argues that lyric 95 "reveals a more complex aspect of Tennyson's own revelatory states than is often observed. To argue that the

poem records a modern literary epiphany and not a traditional mystical vision is not to reduce its power and meaning but rather to give it a wider range of applicability and significance” (141). Richard Dunn in his article “Vision and Revision: In Memoriam 95” explores how this particular lyric and the whole poem “explore the transition from self consciousness to imagination” and how “section 95 [is] the imaginative turning point of In Memoriam and gives Tennyson a unique position in the Romantic tradition” (136).

The character and implications of lyric 95 have been related to Romantic poetics, as has the lyric’s form or action. Nichols refers to lyric 95 saying that this is a place where “The power of the Romantic legacy in Tennyson is clearly evident” (144). Richard J. Dunn states that the crucial Romantic purpose of exploring the transition from self-consciousness to imagination is achieved in lyric 95 (136). Dunn lists different means by which Romantic poets in dealing with the problem of transition from self-consciousness to imagination: Keats uses negative capability; Wordsworth uses wise passiveness; Byron uses defiance; and Shelley uses abstraction (144-145). However, as Dunn goes on to argue, Tennyson achieves the transition from self-consciousness to imagination through “union with his subject” (145). I believe by studying the imagery patterns in this particular lyric we will be able to discern a paradigm in Tennyson’s description of epiphany in other poems dealing with the deaths of characters whose deaths have culturally symbolic implications. This lyric in In Memoriam includes all the essential characteristics of Tennysonian death epiphanies: “intensity”(embodied in the flashing imagery), “expansiveness” and “mysteriousness” (Bidney 86-89). “Intensity” and flashing imagery are introduced in the line “The living soul was flash’d on mine” and

“The white kine glimmer’d” (37). The “expansiveness” of the experience is hinted at in the very structure of this lyric in which the images of the glimmering kine and trees frame the actual epiphanic experience. Hence, the importance of this moment and its ramifications on the future are foregrounded. “Mysteriousness” at the heart of this experience is indicated through the repetition of different forms of the word strange: “strangely,” and “strange” (25-28). Moreover, the poetic persona is incapable of describing this experience “Vague words! But ah, how hard to frame / In matter-moulded forms of speech, / Or even for intellect to reach / Thro’ memory that which I became” (45-48).

The first four stanzas of this distinctly long lyric create the conditions for the imaginative transition that is about to take place. The use of the word “linger’d” in the first line calls to our mind a liminal state since lingering is going nowhere while the liminal is the borderline. Moreover, “filmy shapes” draws our attention to the haziness of the atmosphere drawing us away from material reality (10). The crickets stop chirping, and the trees “lay their dark arms about the field” (16). Bats are introduced, possibly signifying the dark inner recesses of the mind that are about to come to surface. We gradually move from the concrete setting of the lawn to a liminal epiphanic chronotope of charged imaginative power. His friends all leave him alone to read the letters of his dead friend, the object of his desire. Or is he? It becomes increasingly clear here that it is not actually Hallam, nor an Ultimate power, that Tennyson attempts to unite with. Rather, it is desire for the epiphanic experience itself. In this light, Hallam and the letters with their incantatory language are used by Tennyson to signify authentic epiphany.

Reference to evocation of “Aeonian music” in lyric 95 stresses again how this epiphanic situation directly concerns poetry (41). The role written language plays in this experience is further clarified through phrases like “silent speaking words” and “love’s dumb cry defying change” (26-27). Although we notice Tennyson’s constant subsequent doubt about the capability of mere words to portray adequately the epiphanic experience, the climax of the role of language here in creating the epiphanic moment is in the lines “so word by word, and line by line, / The dead man touch’d me from the past [...] The living soul was flashed on mine” (33-36). According to Nichols the linguistic incantatory power of the letters along with Tennyson’s powerful predisposition, which is the state of mind that precedes epiphany, are epitomized in the above lines (142-143). Hence, Tennyson most clearly states that through language, epiphany can be experienced. However, the nature and significance of this union with the dead and with that which are doubtful as Tennyson refers to it as something, which “seemed” to happen (35). Yet once more the moment does not last because Tennyson is again “stricken through with doubt” (44). Nichols refers to the multifarious implication of the Aeonian music:

Tennyson’s Aeonian music measures out not only the “steps of Time” and “blows of Death,” but also the “shocks of Chance.” These shocks of chance describe the accidents that bring together various mental contents into a focused image or mood. (143)

Epiphany in these terms may be seen as one of the “shocks of chance” which brings together two contradictory discourses in this lyric: rational scepticism and poetic insight

(42). Hence again here, the relation between Tennyson’s doubtful revelatory moments and poetry is stressed.

In poem 95 Tennyson portrays the dialogism between scientific and poetic pastoral speech zones. All the literary work’s abstract elements gravitate toward the liminal epiphanic moment allowing the imaging power of art to do its work. In this lyric the sceptical speech zone of science meets with the poetic pastoral speech zone. Hence, pastoral nature in stanzas 1 and 2 build up towards the epiphanic moment and reappear once again after it is cancelled by scientific doubt that stresses that only the material exists. Through this liminal epiphanic moment Tennyson has been able to experience the intensity of poetic inspiration and yet instantly acknowledge to scientific reality with the humbling apparatus of doubt. Hence, the epiphanic experience in this lyric ultimately challenges the rationality of Victorian Utilitarianism and yet does not completely overthrow it, on account of the doubt which is still involved in it.

Hence, here the relation between Tennyson’s doubtful revelatory moments and its relation to focusing of poetic imagery is clearly argued. Yet once more the moment does not last because Tennyson is “stricken through with doubt” (44). He is brought back to pastoral nature; the lines “The white kine glimmer’d, and the trees /Laid their dark arms about the fields” are repeated, signalling how he has come back full circle to his original state of consciousness (51-52). In this liminal epiphanic moment contradictory discourses are poised momentarily: the Utilitarian, which rejects the immaterial and depicts nature as a fickle evolutionary goddess, and the Romantic poetic discourse that attempts to attain epiphanic moments often through contact with an inspirational form of nature. We are

brought back to pastoral nature where “full-foliaged elms,” “lilies” and the “heavy-folded rose” actively swing and fling (58-60). Finally, this entire natural realm is endowed with a voice and calls out, “The dawn, the dawn” (61). Hence, nature itself here is represented as calling our attention to the importance of the liminal epiphanic moment; the poem ends with an image signifying unison: “the dawn” (61). Here polarities can meet, East and West, life and death and possibly scientific and poetic notions of nature. Nature to Tennyson is analogous to poetic language: “For words, like Nature, half reveal / And half conceal the Soul within” (lyric 5, 3-4).

Bakhtin states in The Dialogic Imagination that authoritative discourses are “incapable of being double-voiced; [and] cannot enter into hybrid constructions” (43). What is interesting about Tennyson’s In Memoriam is that he invites authoritative or official discourses like Science and religion to meet with an internally persuasive discourse, which is poetry. In the process of doing this he challenges the authority of these texts by allowing them to react with one another in a liminal medium. Hence the speech zones of the Victorian Laureate poet who accepts the new scientific discoveries and “wild” Romantic poet seeking inspiration from nature mingle but never completely mix (Lyric 34, 7). This dialogism differs from the last lyrics of In Memoriam, where Tennyson seems to resort instead to a conventional vague wish that these contradictory discourses can somehow mix to form one uncontradictory whole. Hence, the religious Christian readers were satisfied by In Memoriam as well as the scientists. The critic Lionel Stevenson explains the acceptance of Tennyson’s In Memoriam by leading scientists and philosophers of the time:

In Memoriam was welcomed by the leading scientists and philosophers as the first significant effort to give new problems serious poetic treatment. Herschel, Owen, Sedgwick, Tyndall, and Huxley were among those who admired Tennyson’s scientific method and his desire to champion truth. They encouraged him to continue his reconciliation of genuine scientific interest with sincere and independent religious conviction. (92-93)

I would like to comment here on the word “reconciliation”. What makes Tennyson’s reconciliation satisfactory for both the scientists and the religious readers is the dialogic manner with which he introduces the discourses, never allowing one to overcome the other but letting them co-exist side by side. This explains why his attempts at representing epiphany are always tinged with doubt. Even the climatic epiphanic moment in lyric 95 is tinged with scientific skepticism: “ At length my trance / Was cancell’d, stricken thro’ with doubt” (44-45). Furthermore by the argument which I have attempted to make concerning the importance of language and poetry in the poem through tracing the evolution of epiphany and the speech zone of Romantic poetry, we realize that Tennyson was referring to poetry as the realm where the scientific, religious and imaginative can meet. Through the notion of liminality he is able to relate the different speech zones to one another and at the same time respect the individuality of each discourse. Hence the “reconciliation” which Victorian readers liked so much was not due to Tennyson’s desire to champion one truth but due to his refusal to adhere to one notion of absolute truth.

Thus we can conclude on the basis of In Memoriam itself, that the recurrent moments of liminal epiphany are uniquely related to both poetic imaginative vision and Utilitarian rationality. The importance of poetry in these liminal states highlights the therapeutic role Tennyson believed art could play in overcoming trauma due to death "like dull narcotics numbing pain" (lyric 5, 8). The poem strongly implies, without making explicit or extravagant claims, that a contemporary culture (post-Romantic, materialistic, utilitarian) suffering the death of confident belief might likewise be restored to a nobler self by embracing the discredited values of imagination and poetry. Furthermore, the liminal epiphanic moment becomes a site where scientific and poetic discourses mingle undecidably.

The next two chapters will extend this analysis of the liminal epiphanic experience to other major death poems by Tennyson. This exploration will show how my mode of analysis confirms or enriches this manner of interpretation. Chapter 2 will deal with poems in which the death contemplated is of a symbolic cultural hero. Chapter 3 will concern itself with the death of women characters, where Tennyson reverses a discernable pattern developed in the poems about dying men.

Tennyson wrote in addition to In Memoriam many other poems featuring death or death-like experiences including: “Charge of the Light Brigade,” “The Deserted House,” “The Burial of Love,” “Elegiacs,” “The Dying Swan,” “Love and Death,” “The Death of the Old Year,” “Mariana in the South,” “Despair” and “On a Mourner”. However, my present study is focused on instances of significant cultural critique through the symbolic use of death or death-like experience. In effect, this focus foregrounds poems featuring legendary or folkloric figures: “Morte D’Arthur,” “Ulysses,” “Tithonus,” “Tiresias,” “The Lady of Shalott,” “Elaine,” “Oenone,” “The Death of Oenone,” “The Lord of Burleigh” and “The Dying Swan.” By examining affinities in Tennyson’s adaptation of these already symbolic cultural icons we can discern how he adapts their traditional associations to suit his purposes of cultural lament. By tracing in particular the motif of epiphany in these poems, we find again and again Tennyson’s oblique mingling of two opposing discourses of the Victorian age: the Utilitarian and the Romantic. To deal with this opposition, Tennyson further introduces the notion of liminality as a means to mingle dialogically what Elton Edward Smith suggests are the “two voices” within Tennyson. Smith’s view of the constant tension we discern in Tennyson’s poetry can be summarized in the five chapter titles of Smith’s study: “Art versus Society; Sense versus Soul; Doubt versus Faith; Past versus Present; Delicacy versus Strength” (Smith 21). I, however, would like to redefine these two voices as the voice of the Romantic and the voice of the Utilitarian, since I find that it is this main tension that informs the sense of struggle which Smith deals with in his study.

I agree with Alan Sinfield's argument in his book Alfred Tennyson, that Tennyson "was caught up in institutions far beyond the literary, and positioned in ways which were unsatisfactory and contradictory" (184). I believe the inner struggle between Utilitarian thought, (which was the hegemonic discourse), and Romantic thought is the source of Tennyson's sometimes apparently contradictory positions. As Sinfield explains, Tennyson lived in a rather transitional period with regard to the role of poetry. Sinfield then goes on to clarify that around the 1850s, "bourgeois hegemony appropriated almost entirely the concept of poetry [...] But from 1870 writers and thinkers took up the [...] line, manifesting 'a reaction against the values of the middle-class reader'"(165). Though Sinfield argues that Tennyson reacted accordingly to each of these changes with regard to time, switching affiliations (with and against the Utilitarian hegemonic discourse) at the beginning of his career and towards its end, I believe that the struggle between opposing discourses (Utilitarian and Romantic) was within him from the beginning. From the beginning of his career he had a tendency to find haven in liminal positions of imaginative intensity, such as his epiphanic moments. What further complicates his Romantic stance is his dual Romantic stance, both Shelleyan and Keatsian. This explains the important position assigned to liminal epiphanic moments in this study about dying cultural heroes or dying women portrayed as cultural signs. By concentrating on these moments it becomes possible to detect in the poem's structure paradigmatic movements for dying characters. Dying male cultural heroes tend to begin their death journey from the centre, through the liminal and ending in the marginal. This pattern is so strong, and

so different from the death journeys of Tennyson's otherwise comparable dying women, that I have made it my principle of chapter division here.

Other readers have remarked on the gendered differences among Tennyson's characters. For purposes of convenient reference only, I will distinguish Tennyson's two types of dying characters as he does, by biological kind. They are represented in these texts, as men or women. Of course their symbolic implications do not necessarily include biological attributes. The gendering of those figurative qualities (feminizing or masculinizing) is a much more significant concern, partly because Tennyson's dead women characters exhibit a different pattern from that of his dying men characters. Lynne O'Brien argues that Tithonus dies a figuratively female death because he falls prey to erotic passion, which is considered by Tennyson to be an inferior form of love: "For Tennyson, sexual passion seems to be among those primitive characteristics that man will rise above" (179). Moreover, we can divide Tennyson's dying cultural heroes into two types as Lynne O'Brien does with Tennyson's male heroes in general. We notice that all the dying heroes we deal with (Arthur, Tiresias and Ulysses), with the exception of Tithonus, set aside erotic love as something incompatible with what Lynne O'Brien terms as "male achievement". By "male achievement" Lynne O'Brien refers to the masculine world of action the world Ulysses inhabits as he "takes other kingdoms and pillages other homes" (178). Lynne O'Brien argues that we can find two types of male heroes in Tennyson's poetry in general. One type is exemplified by Arthur, Ulysses and Tiresias who incarnate Tennyson's belief that "erotic love and male achievement are incompatible" (O'Brien 179). The other type is exemplified by Tithonus who cannot

transcend physical attraction and hence suffers in the shadow of his dawn goddess (O'Brien 179). I believe Tennyson dialogically mingles both these types, not preferring one over the other, since the Ulysses model represents "male achievement," while in the Tithonus model there was "a spiritual victory [...] which contrasts with Ulysses's spiritual defeat incurred from many years of triumph in battle" (O'Brien, 178). I, however, do not agree that Tennyson preferred one heroic model to the other. Tennyson did not consider erotic love an inferior form of love; in an analysis of the liminal moment in "Tithonus" where Tithonus is inspired by the erotic visions of Aurora, we can find no implication that he is dismissing the significance of these moments. This further portrays the importance of analyzing liminal epiphanic moments in Tennyson's death poems to reach a better understanding of his poetry, which is so dialogic in spirit.

In light of O'Brien's argument that "Tennyson posited the need for man to move back and forth between the male world (represented by fighting the "just" war) and the feminine sphere" we can better understand Tennyson's models of men's deaths (174). What interests me here is that the masculine world is portrayed through the technique of epiphany in all the poems with the exception of "Tithonus" as an imaginatively poetic world and the cultural hero as a symbolically poetic figure. Tithonus is an example of a different model of ascribed masculine heroism, which is also extreme since he immerses himself completely in an erotic feminine world, which is also endowed with poetic inspiration. For the first time, Tennyson through a dying poetic hero admits outright the creative inspirational possibilities in the Romantic feminine sphere. However, this is partially hidden through the dialogism of the epiphanic moment. Daniel A. Harris

classifies Tithonus's death-like state and wish to die with other Tennysonian dead women: "Rather, it resembles the deaths sought by Oenone [...] who cannot otherwise master her emotions after Paris jilts her, or Mariana, who cannot tolerate Angelo's absence" (7).

In "Morte D'Arthur," whose very title foregrounds the significance of death, Tennyson shapes the legend of King Arthur to suit the conditions of his own age. He uses the defeat and death of Arthur as an emblem of dying cultural and artistic values for which he is nostalgic. Employing the liminal space of epiphany enables him to express his lament for these forsaken values while at the same time satisfying the complacencies of a Victorian audience who might welcome the return of Arthur on their own terms in the garb of "a modern [Victorian] gentleman" (294).

Moreover, the liminal moment, as I have identified it in the private elegy In Memoriam, actuates the critical moment of mingling opposing discourses. In addition to that, in Tennyson's public poems dealing with the deaths of legendary men, it becomes a moment of struggle between two imaginative regions: the marginal and the centre. These two spaces are imaginative in the sense that they are not actual places. Though they might refer to actual positions of poetry towards society, they are nevertheless imaginatively constructed spaces invented by Tennyson to shape his inner struggle. This struggle includes and recapitulates the struggle of the poet between an isolated existence detached from immediate engagement with society and an orderly conformist existence within society. At the heart of this dilemma lie Tennyson's "two voices" and the epiphanic moments which his cultural heroes experience, usually in the process of a deliberate

departure from and abandonment of the centre.¹ There is also a gendered context. A paradigm recurs in Tennyson's legendary male death poems, with the possible exception of "Tithonus". As we will see this death paradigm is the movement of the dying hero from the cultural centre to the margins through a liminal transitional space that includes epiphanic imagery. "Tithonus" follows the pattern in poems about dying women figures to be discussed in the next chapter. It also utilizes a different Romantic poetic philosophy than that employed in "Morte D'Arthur" or "Ulysses"; "Tithonus" is more in the manner of Keats's sensual imagery than that of Shelley.

In contrast to *In Memoriam*'s web-like structure, the death poems about legendary males usually follow a linear structure moving from the centre through liminality to the marginal. Between Tennyson's imagined centre and his imagined outlined margins there is a liminal space. By liminality here I mean a moment where the dying characters pass through the threshold, archway or shoreline between two imaginative regions in their journey of death, since the liminal is defined as "of or relating to a transitional stage" (Canadian Oxford Dictionary). For example, in both "Morte D'Arthur" and "Ulysses" we see a poetic man figure at the centre of culture expressing dissatisfaction with it. In this stage of the paradigm a social critique of modern Victorian values is introduced along with an elegiac lament for lost or past values. The second stage in the process is the liminal moment of crisis when the heroic poet envisions a better, now marginal, world. The liminal epiphanic experience brings together both Utilitarian and Romantic poetic notions, allowing these contradictory discourses to mingle. Finally, the third stage of the paradigm features the poet's decision to forsake the centre of culture, seeking the

marginal as a source of preservation or actuation of values not fulfilled at the centre. It is accordingly a voyage of death literally and metaphorically. And in the case of Tennyson's men characters, a voyage directed towards a curiously doubtful eternity. As we shall see, it seems that dead heroes are portrayed to be beyond closure or containment by the grave, and beyond the finality assumed by society's "fools of habit" referred to in lyric 10 of In Memoriam (12). Rather, they are relocated to an indefinite periphery, as the unconventionally inconclusive burial preferred for Hallam and described in lyric 10: "fathom deep in brine; / And hands so often clasp'd in mine / Should toss with tangle and with shells" (18-20). Tennyson imagines an active eternal existence for his heroic legendary figures whether in Elysium, Avalon, Heaven or at the bottom of the sea. Tennyson is reluctant to allow his culturally heroic men, discussed in this study, to utterly expire.

Morte D'Arthur:

In "Morte D'Arthur" and its framing text, "The Epic," we begin at the centre of a society at a moment of cultural crisis. Society is represented as having become indifferent to the role of Romantic poetic vision. This Romantic Poetic vision is associated with poets such as Shelley and the fictional Everard Hall, the neglected bardic poet figure in the framing text, who champion the importance of poetry in society. Shelley in his A Defence of Poetry states, "Poets [...] are the institutors of laws, and the founders of civil society, and the inventors of the arts of life, and the teachers, who draw into a certain propinquity with the beautiful and the true" (Shelley 7). The framing section to the

“Morte D’Arthur” explicitly presents the Victorian age as a contemporary context for an intellectually dead society, which marginalizes poetry.

First, however, we should consider the vivid liminal epiphanic moment that highlights the narrative section itself. It signals a change, with uncertain implications, for the culture that is now dying with its king. The key passage is lines 136 through 161. Like Arthur, the values associated with his sword must be set aside and reserved until the world is prepared to receive it. The last glimpse we have of the sword has all the characteristics of the literary epiphany we have previously discussed in chapter 1: “expansive[ness],” “mysterious[ness]” and “intens[ity]” (3). Bidney also finds in Tennysonian epiphanies “the rolling, wheeling motions that accompany the fire-flowers’ recurrent appearances and the elevating but foreboding sense of thresholdness or liminality that provides the spiritual frame for the heightened moment”(78). Bidney goes on to define these three terms saying, “ ‘Expansiveness’ implies that the moment in question seems to mean far more than its limitedness in time and space might warrant [...] ‘Mystery’ indicates the inexplicability at the heart of the epiphanic experience: the inner power that the vision conveys [...] is felt as vivid but rationally unaccountable [...] The intensity criterion is crucial to any description of literary epiphanies” (2-3). In Tennyson’s description of the sword there is indeed a great deal of intensity traced in the flashing and circular motion: “Made lightnings [...] and flashing round and round, and whirled in an arch [...] Shot like a streamer” (137-139). Furthermore, it is a “mysterious” moment since a hand “white, samite, mystic, wonderful” rises out of the water and catches, the sword reserving it in an unknown place (144). This moment is also

“expansive” since it reaches into the future. The sword and Arthur are gone and they can only return if society once more becomes able to embrace them by reviving the ideal world of “noble chance” and adventure they stood for (230). The splendour and grandeur of the sword’s flight and sinking into the water, and Arthur’s barge voyage to the marginal, brings this to the surface. All of the characteristics of the liminal moment here give us a flavour of the world Arthur has represented. This world of chivalric adventure is an epic world. Furthermore, the very whirling trajectory of the sword forms an arch or window, which gives us a glimpse into both the epic grandeur of the past and the possibility of regaining it in the future. We also get a second glimpse of the characteristics of this past world through the barge, which comes to take Arthur to the marginal space of Avalon. However, the epiphanic moment of the throwing of the sword can be interpreted dialogically on two levels. On one level it may be seen as a nostalgic lament for the passing of the old days: “now I see the true old times are dead” (229). Or it may be seen as welcome or acceptance for the new order: “The old order changeth, yielding place to new, / And God fulfils Himself in many ways” (240-241). Hence, the sword and Arthur’s old order may be interpreted both as an obsolete object to be discarded and as an object to be saved for future restoration. From this springs the “mysterious” nature of the epiphanic moment, since its meaning cannot be fixed in the absolute. We cannot absolutely comprehend the inner power of vision conveyed by the epiphanic moment.

A dialogic interpretation can be discerned in the framing narrative of Morte D’Arthur which introduces us to the differing discourses of the Victorian age. Alan

Sinfield in his book Alfred Tennyson discusses the role assigned to poetry in Victorian culture, arguing that the middle classes after the industrial revolution and the economic ascendancy it gave them sought ideological hegemony. The crucial beliefs of this ideological hegemony included Utilitarianism, political economy, and a belief in the virtues of machinery. Within the bourgeois ideological attempt to accommodate poetry, Sinfield clarifies three ways it dealt with poetry: relegation, incorporation and marginalization. The first, relegation, aimed to dismiss poetry altogether as frivolous, the second, incorporation, saw it as a tool to disseminate the beliefs of bourgeois hegemony, while the third, marginalization, assigned it the peripheral space left when the main business of the world has been done, inviting it only to concentrate on exploring states of mind (16-19). This variety of possible Utilitarian attitudes to poetry is dramatized through the responses of the listeners to the bardic poet Hall's recitation of the last surviving section of the old legend of King Arthur, in the framing narrative. It also introduces us to the rival discourses of Victorian England.

This framing narrative is crucial because it dramatizes various possible reactions of Victorian society to the hypothetical prospect of a return of the values associated with Arthur (the old order). The possible dismissal by Victorians of the return of these values can be seen as symbolic of Victorian bourgeois hegemony's marginalization of poetry. Francis and Parson Holmes's attitudes correspond to Sinfield's definition of Victorian, Utilitarian views of poetry. Indeed, through the utilization of the myth of Arthur, Tennyson dialogically juxtaposes with a peripheralized Shelleyan vision of poets as "institutors of laws, and the founders of civil society" an authoritative Utilitarian outlook

that either “relegate[s]” or “incorporate[s]” or “marginalize[s]” poetry (Alfred Tennyson 17). The framing narrative is in this way reminiscent of a section in In Memoriam in which Tennyson imagines typical Utilitarian responses of readers to his poem. In lyric 21, Tennyson imagines three possible scornful responses to his lament over Hallam: in the first reaction expression of emotions is considered a weakness (“This fellow would make weakness weak”); in the second reaction writing is considered merely a means to gain fame (“He loves to make parade of pain, / That with his piping he may gain”); while in the third reaction writing is considered to have no place in an age of scientific discovery (“A time to sicken and to swoon, / When Science reaches forth her arms”) (7-18). The lack of respect for poetic creation might reach the degree that, as is described elsewhere in In Memoriam, the poems may have only trifling uses: “What hope is there for modern rhyme / To him, who turns a musing eye [...] These mortal lullabies of pain / May bind a book, may line a box, / May serve to curl a maiden’s locks” (lyric 77, 1-7). By elaborating in “The Epic” these reactions, Tennyson implies that these reactions are attitudes similar to the obtuseness of Allen and Parson Holmes. Even Hall himself had lost hope in his poetry and attempted to destroy his work. Indifference to poetry indicates an intellectual and cultural death. However, a note of hope still exists in the speaker, who alone is affected and moved by the poem, though his interpretation is rather naive since he sees already in Victorian England a new Camelot.

Through the response of Parson Holmes to Hall’s reading we are introduced to two intellectual contradictory discourses preoccupying Victorian England: science and religion. Holmes thinks things have been reduced to “schism[s]” and scientific codes that

deny any place for a poetic vision (16). Parson Holmes is the listener least affected by Hall's poem; he is sent to sleep by the mere sound of its "deep- chested music" (51). Though he is the one who most professes to be against the general state of things at the beginning of the poem, he is the one most deaf to imagination and poetry as the possible solution. All that concerns him are the superficialities of church politics, not true faith, an attitude that hints that his own values are for Tennyson all too symptomatic of the age. Funding for churches' "church commissioners," geological discoveries, and ecclesiastical disputes are all complained about by him, but he does not attempt to solve these problems and prefers to merely rage and rant against them (15). The intellectual and religious climate he fatuously describes is "general decay" (18). Materialism has overcome religion to the extent that it has merely become a set of "odd games" (8). Some unspecified original state of true spirituality is lamented and through the use of verbs like "dwindled" (8). In a further worldly platitude, Christmas is described as having lost "all the old honor" (7). Tennyson may be projecting onto the complaining parson any impression of naïve or self-serving nostalgia that might otherwise contaminate his own more searching and complex exploration of cultural loss.

However, the very different reaction of the speaker of "The Epic" is worth noting. He also is suffering from a state of intellectual slumber: "fell in a doze; and half-awake" (13). Yet he is the one most affected by Hall's poetry at the end of the poem. He seems resurrected by the poetry because though he is languid and quiet while describing the reactions of the other guests in a detached manner, as soon as the poet starts reading he awakes. This is clear in the simile used to describe himself: "I, though sleepy, like a horse

/ That hears the corn-bin open, prick'd my ears" (44-45). Through this image the speaker highlights a state of deathly deprivation in his society. He is starved for poetic inspiration because he remembers the "fame" and acclaim related to it: "I remembered Everard's college fame" and hence anticipates the reading with instinctive hunger (46). Moreover, he is the only one inspired enough by the poem to dream in the last section of the poem. Through sleep, an altered state of consciousness, he is able to imagine Arthur once more. What is striking about this vision is that it directly relates the legend of Arthur to the Victorian present: "King Arthur, like a modern gentleman," reappears (294). The reference to Arthur as a "modern gentleman" is also, however, an expression of the naive Victorian interpretation of the Victorian age as a modern Camelot. E.D.H. Johnson deals with this superficial interpretation of the Victorians when he refers to Tennyson's Idylls of the King: "To the great majority of Victorian readers this work came to seem an heroic tribute to the values on which their society prided itself" (42). This self-satisfied Victorian vision of a re-appropriated past is hinted at in the last lines of the poem: "King Arthur, like a modern gentleman / [...] is come again: he cannot die" (294-296). Nevertheless, it seems as if this dream has inspired him to some degree to hear beyond the materialistic, beyond the ritualistic customs. This is clarified through his description of his experience of hearing the church-bells: "and hear indeed / The clear church-bells ring in the Christmas morn" (302-303). He has heard these Christmas church bells before but there is an air about this particular time, which distinguishes it from all other past experiences. The difference is that he has been inspired by the poetic rendering of the myth of Arthur. However, despite the positive effect, the speaker is still complacent about

the Victorian age and its predominant Utilitarian manners and morals, which are more worthy of criticism than praise. Shelley in his A Defence of Poetry attacks the “promoters of utility”:

Whilst the mechanist abridges, and the political economist combines, labour, let them beware that their speculations, for want of correspondence with those first principles which belong to the imagination, do not tend, as they have in modern England, to exasperate at once the extremes of luxury and want. The rich have become richer, and the poor have become poorer.

(27)

Dialogism is also played out in the reaction of the third listener, the host. The host's extreme reaction is rather puzzling. He had initially seemed to be the one who most believed in the power of Hall's poetry: “I hold by him” (22). Furthermore, he is the one who saves the eleventh book of Hall's work from being burnt: “But I, / Said Francis, pick'd the eleventh from this hearth” (40-41). He seems interested in poetry. However, after the poem is read, he contemptuously dismisses the power of the poetry, saying, “There now - that's nothing!” and violently stamps his foot in the fireplace (285). It is almost as if he corresponds to Sinfield's notion of “relegation” according to which poetry was dismissed by Utilitarians as unimportant. He is described as “muttering, like a man ill-used,” possibly because he resents being troubled by the poem's deeper implications (284). He had seen poetry in the beginning as a means of amusement, an after- dinner dessert: “I hoard it as a sugar-plum” (43). Isobel Armstrong stresses the double-voiced nature of the poetry of this period saying, “To concentrate on the ludic energies of

language rather than its conflicts is to miss the underlying element of struggle in poetry of this period, its engagement with a content, its political awareness” (11). Now the host senses that poetry is not merely light entertainment but a source of powerful engagement.

All these reactions underline the fact that Tennyson in “Morte D’Arthur” is not simply retelling Thomas Malory’s version of Arthur’s death, but is using the legend as a form to satirize a society that is dead spiritually and rejects or misunderstands poetry. This is why Excalibur and Arthur, arguably both symbols of poetic inspiration, are in “Morte D’Arthur” taken away to the marginal space and reserved there.

In Hall’s narration of Arthur’s death we are thrust all at once into what can be termed, in the paradigm of Tennysonian death experience, the cultural centre. In Morte D’Arthur “the centre” is an atmosphere of death actual and symbolic. The setting, both historical and prophetic, of “Morte D’Arthur” is overcome by an aura of death and deterioration. The description of the land after the last battle calls to mind a spiritually barren wasteland: “A broken chancel with a broken cross [...] stood on a dark strait of barren land” (9-10). Arthur the dying king is at the centre of this scene. The “goodliest fellowship of famous knights” is dead and with them die “knightly deeds” (15-19). Nevertheless, this scene of disaster represents the actual – the nation’s briefly contested cultural centre in which a nobler prospect has been offered and rejected. Darkness is descending after the failure or defeat of an experiment with the imaginative brightness represented by Arthur’s vision of a just society and by his sparkling weapon the sword Excalibur.

The ensuing interlude of “Morte D’Arthur” is liminal, the transitional incident in the king’s passage from that centre towards a marginal and yet heaven-like abode rich in implications of future recovery and return. The fate of the symbolic sword in the interim is the evidently crucial element at this in-between moment.

The imagery of the sword, with its “lightenings in the splendor of the moon, / And flashing round and round, and whirled in an arch, / Shot like a streamer of the northern morn,” connects it clearly with Tennyson’s metaphors elsewhere for imaginative and creative activity and liminal epiphanic possibility (137-139). It is still the sole shining, moving object amid the dimness and stasis of the following sections. Its safe reconsignment to the Lady of the Lake depends not on the expiring poet-king, however, but on the severely tested loyalty of a follower.

Bedivere, the last remaining knight, is an embodiment of all the negative and positive aspects of Arthur’s present world as well as Tennyson’s. Bedivere is blind to the true significance of the sword. He represents a Utilitarian Victorian outlook; his two attempts to keep the sword for himself compose two possible Utilitarian interpretations of its importance. His eyes are “dazzled” by its material beauty (59). The visual imagery here helps to underline this as the sword is described to have “twinkled with diamond studs, / Myriads of topaz-lights, and jacinth-work” (56-57). The second time, he tries to justify his disobedience by claiming that disobeying Arthur’s instructions is an act for the good of mankind as a “record” or “relic” of Arthur (98). Like Queen Victoria’s precious jewel, the Kohinoor, the sword would remain “in some treasure-house” to be displayed at jousts (101). Both of these interpretations of the sword ignore its symbolic value in

relation to Arthur's round table. Arthur himself berates Bedivere for this, saying "Thou wouldst betray me for the precious hilt; / Either from lust of gold, or like a girl / Valuing the giddy pleasure of the eyes" (126-128). This is why the sword had to be returned to the Lady of the Lake. In the hands of Bedivere it would only be reduced to his materialistic, utilitarian perceptions of it. Michael Ferber discusses the symbolic significance of the sword in Christian culture saying,

Central to the language of Christianity is the metaphor of "spiritual warfare" [...] It is expressed in Paul's Letter to the Ephesians. Since Christians do not fight against flesh and blood but against spiritual wickedness, "Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, [...] And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God". (15)

Here a totally different significance related to the sword is introduced, confirming its symbolic possibilities. However, In Tennyson's text, these symbolic possibilities are more related to death and poetry. Arthur can be interpreted as the poet figure whose sword instigates the liminal moment between life and death and then sails to the marginal sphere distant from reality and culture. Arthur is a poetic figure who had the vision to actuate the noble Camelot. Bedivere realizes this as he sees Arthur off; the times of "noble chance(s)" and "noble knight(s)" have been replaced by the actions of knights like Bedivere himself (230-231). Bedivere refers to the Round Table as "an image of the mighty world" (235).

We also get a second glimpse of the characteristics of this past world (old order) through the barge, which comes to take Arthur to the marginal sphere of Avalon. Arthur himself refers to his destination as the margin, confirming the death paradigm we are attempting to discern: "And bear me to the margin" (165). Though we sense that what will follow is Arthur's journey to the eternal, Tennyson typically colours this moment with doubt as Arthur says, "yet I fear / My wound hath taken cold, and I shall die" (165-166). Some lines later he repeats this doubt once more: "I fear it is too late, and I shall die" (180). The barge magically appears, carrying the three richly crowned queens who, "complaining loud, / And dropping bitter tears," convey him into the mists of some mysterious condition between life and death (207-210). We notice here how reluctant Tennyson is to let Arthur die. He fastens on to this element of the Arthurian myth itself because of his interest in allowing the culturally heroic male figure to live on in the marginal realm. Arthur cannot die, because the possibility of his return must always exist. His description of Avalon has all the characteristics of paradise: "Where falls not hail, or rain, or snow, / [...] Deep- meadow'd, happy, fair with orchard-lawns" (260-261). It is a world where fantasy is still possible, where a dying man can heal himself of a "grievous wound" (264). No burial is referred to or described, though Arthur himself has doubts about his destination and his survival. Eternal life, or at least a period of doubtful suspended animation in Arthur's case, is hinted at: "To the island-valley of Avilion; / Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow," (596). Hence we have a classic instance of paradigmatic death journey of the male figure from the centre, through the liminal, to the marginal.

Tiresias

The poem "Tiresias" follows the same paradigm of dying cultural heroes configured as poets. Though Tiresias is not the one actually dying and sacrificing himself, we can consider his advice to Menoeceus as an expression of the image of the cultural hero he wishes to uphold. David Goslee argues that by advising him to sacrifice himself to save his people he is repeating his own sacrifice of eyesight to become his society's prophet: "in confronting Menoeceus, he is confronting a mocking image of his own younger, more capable self" (69). Hence, despite the fact that the whole poem is about Menoeceus's death, it is the voice of the seer Tiresias which dominates the poem as he encourages the young Menoeceus to sacrifice himself so that, "Thebes through thee shall stand" (137). Tiresias begins his dying journey at the centre of society in a besieged and cursed Thebes. An analysis of the epiphanic moment here once more deciphers Tennyson's code for heroic men's deaths.

Although the liminal moment for Tiresias is the moment he loses his sight, it is liberating and empowering in the sense that it is the moment he becomes a prophet and a seer and by implication a poet. Tiresias's aim is to seek knowledge: "so keen to seek / The meanings ambushed under all they saw" (4-5). In this sense he fits the paradigm of the Shelleyan poet figure who through poetry contributes to knowledge. Ironically, the blinding epiphanic moment of ultimate knowledge had been Tiresias's goal. The epiphanic moment takes place when Tiresias beholds Pallas Athene naked: "a dreadful light / Came from her golden hair, her golden helm / And all her golden armour on the grass" (42-44). The female body of Pallas Athene, the goddess of wisdom and justice,

becomes a source for both the curse of blindness and the gift of wisdom. The imagery of this moment has some of the distinguishing characteristics of epiphany outlined by Bidney, such as “expansive[ness]” and “mysterious[ness]” (3). Moreover, we also have one of the distinguishing characteristics of Tennysonian epiphany in particular, “flashing” (Bidney 78). The flashing quality can be discerned in words like “glittering,” “light” and “golden” (40-43). The expansiveness is due to extension into the future since he gains the power of prophecy through it: “Henceforth be blind, for thou hast seen too much [...] And as it were, perforce, upon me flashed / The power of prophesying” (55-56). The moment is “mysterious” because there is an “inexplicability at the heart of the epiphanic experience: the inner power that the vision conveys” (Bidney 2). We do not completely understand why Tiresias has to lose his sight to become a seer and prophet. The epiphanic moment can be interpreted dialogically here in the sense that Tiresias’s loss of sight (epiphanic moment) can be seen as both useful in the sense that he becomes a prophet and useless in the sense that nobody heeds his words. The dialogic nature of the epiphanic moment is epitomised in the oxymoronic statement “speak the truth that no man may believe” (49).

At the centre, where men’s dying journey begins, the images and sounds of war overwhelm the atmosphere: “Shouts, arrows, tramp of the hornfooted horse / That grind the glebe to powder! Stony showers” (92-93). Furthermore, it is a continuous state of destruction as, “Shock after shock, the song-built towers and gates / Reel, bruised and butted with the shuddering” (96-97). The destruction and ravaging is epitomized in the auditory image of Thebes as a city from which comes “a murmur void of joy” (99). This

state of suffering which the Thebans face is due to their refusal to believe the prophecies and warnings of Tiresias as a result of their blindness to the truth he tells them: “ and their unbelief, who heard / And heard not, when I spake of famine, plague, / Shrine-shattering earthquake, fire, flood, thunderbolt, And angers of the Gods for evil done” (59-61). As a poet-prophet he warns his people, but his words fall upon deaf ears since “To cast wise words among the multitude / Was flinging fruit to lions” (65-66). Furthermore, the political arena is one of strife and tyranny full of “civil outbreak” and “madness of [...] cities and kings” (70). Tyranny overwhelms the political stage, “the tyranny of one / Was prelude to the tyranny of all? [...] the tyranny of all / Led backward to the tyranny of one?” (72-75).

Moving from the cultural centre amidst the sounds of war through the liminal epiphanic moment of loss of sight, Tennyson ends the poem with a wish to dwell on the margins. This place at the margins is a place where one mingles “with famous kings of old” (163). There the words of cultural heroes are worshipped and “hunters” and “warrior-kings” are active (169-170). Heroic poetry encourages these men onwards to more fame since “the golden lyre” and “Heroic hymns” reverberate in “heroic ears” (173). Death is not final. Cultural heroic men in Tennyson are not allowed to die, and are given the possibility of return since they only leave the centre for some time to dwell upon “their ocean-islets” (164). Tiresias does not die before our eyes but is given the chance to go to the isles of “warrior- kings” from which he might possibly return. In fact one can go so far as say that cultural heroic men do not die in Tennyson’s poetry but are Christlike figures, given the chance of rebirth and return.

Ulysses

Though Ulysses is not actually dying, he is embarking upon a voyage whose end, he knows, is death: "To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths / Of all the western stars, until I die" (60-61). Through an analysis of this dramatic monologue we can discern a complex dialogic in Tennyson's treatment of death in attitudes he ascribes to the legendary character Ulysses. This dialogism can be traced through the pattern of death in this poem. As in "Morte D'Arthur" we can trace three basic constituents in the death pattern: the centre (society), the liminal (where one mingles opposing views of both life and death, the Utilitarian and the poetic); and the margins (where one is beyond the codes of society). For death to occur, Ulysses must occupy these three positions. The two discourses dialogically mingling in this poem are again the Romantic poetic discourse (represented by Ulysses) and the Utilitarian discourse (represented by Telemachus). Ulysses begins his death journey at the centre of society, like the previously discussed cultural heroes.

The liminal moment for Ulysses is his reviving a vision of a life of epic heroic activity, a life free from the constraints of society. He is uttering this farewell speech at a time and place literally between one existence and another, suspending his departure long enough to explain it and to encourage others to join him in the journey from life to death. "Ulysses" is similar to "Morte D'Arthur" in the sense that in both cases the liminal epiphanic moment embodies a vision of the ideal, at a leave-taking, according to an exceptional individual's definition of it. For Ulysses the ideal is a quest for the extraordinary: "all experience is an arch wherethro' / Gleams that untravell'd world,

whose margin fades.” For Arthur, the ideal remains the bright dream that was actuated by Excalibur, but which must fade away now because it is rejected by a materialistic world (19-20). In both cases the liminal epiphanic moment is dialogic in the sense that the hero’s exit may be interpreted as both a welcome of the realistic new order and a lament for the passing of the heroic old order. For example, Ulysses’s decision to “follow knowledge like a sinking star” may be seen as an escapist delusion or the ultimate imaginative goal the Shelleyan poet seeks (30).

The liminal epiphanic moment in Ulysses is expressed in the lines: “Yet all experience is an arch wherethro’ / Gleams that untravell’d world, whose margin fades” (19-20). This liminal moment is one of choice between a materialistic domestic existence of passivity and a masculine epic life of questing, which can end in death at any instant. In a sense we can say it is a choice between two kinds of death: a passive death, which one waits for, or an active death which one welcomes. This is expressed in the line, “To rust unburnish’d, not to shine in use!” (23). Like a sword that keeps its shine through use, Ulysses wishes to shine and die in action. Moreover, the liminal epiphanic moment signals juxtaposition of two rivalling discourses: the discourse of Utilitarianism and the discourse of Shelleyan Romanticism. Ulysses sees it as a waste to “store and hoard” himself in a life “centred in the sphere of common duties” (29-39). Rather, he sees himself as “this gray spirit yearning in desire / To follow knowledge, like a sinking star, / Beyond the utmost bound of human thought” (30-32). The risk of a possibly hastened death is embodied in the phrase “like a sinking star”. Ulysses further elaborates upon his wish to accomplish something before he dies, saying “Death closes all: but something ere

the end, / Some work of noble note, may yet be done” (51-52). The terms in which Ulysses’s ambitions are expressed mark him as a poet-figure. His heart hungers and his quest is for special experience and work, for knowledge, for discovery, beyond ordinary thought. Though undoubtedly an anti-social desire in the short term, the accomplishments he hopes to achieve correspond to the Shelleyan idea of poets expressed in his Defence of Poetry as indirect benefactors of mankind, as “unacknowledged legislators of the world” rather than acknowledged ones like Ulysses’s capable bureaucrat son Telemachus (Shelley 36).

Ulysses the legendary hero figure begins his death journey at the centre of society. It is again a society regarded as suffering from a death-like state of paralysis, materialism and a lack of extraordinary challenge. Ulysses is dissatisfied with the state of society. He is overwhelmed by a sense of stagnation and barrenness as he describes his surroundings: a “still hearth,” “barren crags” and “an aged wife” (2-3). We notice here how his wife is described in terms that, according to the structure of the sentence, actually make her a mere component of the environment so that the hearth and crags are not much different from her. Indeed, Ulysses fails to reconcile social achievement with domestic happiness. Ulysses’s misogyny might be seen as a critique of over-immersion in the world of “male achievement”(O’Brien 179). O’Brien states that “Tennyson is showing that a hero is frequently the victim of his own success, [...] Ulysses’s triumph in his warrior role has prevented him from moving back into the social or domestic world” (174). His people are materialistic and “savage,” in the sense that they only care about satisfying their sensual needs as they “hoard,” “sleep” and “feed” (5). Their world is a world of disorder where

Ulysses can only tediously “mete and dole / Unequal laws” (4-5). There is a note of despair here, as the epic hero feels his society is beyond redemption. He hence prefers to return to his Homeric poetic world, as when he struggled “Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy” (17). Grand epic experience is what he craves, without definite objectives, “roaming with a hungry heart” at the world’s margins (12-16).

Telemachus on the other hand belongs in the centre of this society: “centred in the sphere / Of common duties” (39-40). He is satisfied to rule the “rugged people” Ulysses abhors, because he, like the Victorians, is indifferent to the life of poetic achievement and hence does not understand its value (37). He is therefore, satisfied to uphold the explicit dictates of Utilitarianism, “the useful and the good” (38). Even the religion of these people is described as merely paying “Meet adoration to [...] household gods” (42). “Meet” here means what is merely fit and proper. This is only what interests them: the fit and proper or the appearance of pious propriety. Furthermore, the reference to domesticized “household gods” seems derogatory, and is consistent with Sinfield’s formulation that Utilitarians dismissed or paid lip service to other discourses such as religion.

The marginal desired in Ulysses is an eternal condition outside of time or space, similar to the marginal space in “Morte D’Arthur”. It is referred to as the “Happy Isles” “beyond the sunset,” “the baths,” “the western stars,” which highlights the fact that it is isolation from society that may be the source of their “happy” and inviting state (60-64). This indefinite state seems to be rather escapist, but it may be interpreted as the only manner by which a poetic existence may thrive, since it finds no haven in a utilitarian

Victorian society. This is indicated through reference to the Homeric hero Achilles and through the reference to “temper of heroic hearts” (68). However, as is always the case with Tennyson, he refuses to leave us assured that such an isle exists or that it is possible to achieve eternal life upon it. Doubt is raised in relation to Ulysses’ and the mariners’ capacity to reach the island. Indeed, Ulysses is indifferent to the dangers of the sea which may hinder the acquiring of any definite goal: “It may be that the gulfs will wash us down” (62). Furthermore, doubt is raised in relation to their physical ability to reach the shore of the isles of eternity: “We are not now that strength which in old days / Moved earth and heaven,” “Made weak by time and fate” (66-69). Evidently the journey itself is challenging. Through his portrayal of Ulysses and Telemachus, Tennyson stages a psychomachia of the two voices within him: the Romantic and the Utilitarian.

Tithonus

If an implicit death wish underlies Ulysses’s desire, such a wish is explicit in the poem “Tithonus”. That these two otherwise different texts were closely related in Tennyson’s mind is confirmed by his having called “Tithonus” a pendant to “Ulysses” (Ricks 1112). As poems in which Tennyson uses the death motif, both share with In Memoriam and “Morte D’Arthur” and other poems a pattern of features we are increasingly able to recognize. In every case the death or dying of a central character traditionally or newly invested with mythic status is associated with cultural crisis and with epiphanic imaginative activity signalled by imagery of colour, motion, vitality and intensity amid stagnation and despair. Tithonus’s plea to become like the “happier dead”

is fundamentally the same as Ulysses's imagined "Happy Isles," King Arthur's voyage to Avalon, or Hallam's epiphanic return in lyric 95, though in all these cases Tennyson colours it with persistent doubt. Moreover, the Tithonus myth enables Tennyson to complicate the desirability of the "immortality" sought by the main personas of other poems. In Tithonus's case the gift has already been granted. Yet it turns out to be "cruel," trapping its recipient in endless withering (5).

"Tithonus" as a poem is especially interesting because it inverts the Tennysonian death pattern for other legendary male figures. Instead of moving from the centre, to the liminal and then the marginal, it begins in the marginal and strives to return to the centre, in a way similar, as we shall see, to the emblematic feminine death paradigm, in which a woman's death journey begins in the margins, through the liminal epiphanic moment and ends in the centre. In "Tithonus" we see a legendary character's wish to die, instead of a wish for eternal life. "Tithonus" is a lament for the death of death, or rather the inability to die. Tithonus obviously already lives on the margin of society: "at the quiet limit of the world," "The ever silent spaces of the East" (7-9). An analysis of the liminal epiphanic moment here helps us to understand the reason behind Tennyson's choice to invert the male death paradigm.

The epiphanic moment in Tithonus is a moment of transition that allows him to change his stagnant state of paralysis for a second. Within the sphere of imagination, vitality throbs once more. We witness this in the manner with which imagination and poesy can temporarily revitalize Tithonus who experiences a sense of loss beyond all hope. Eos with her two-horsed chariot appears. She is the imaginative power of epiphany

and brings along with her “glimmer,” “beating” of the heart, “reddening” of the cheek and “brightening” of the eyes, which are all signs of life (34-37). However, this visionary power is derived from complete immersion into a feminine erotic world, and so Tennyson expresses dissatisfaction with it through Tithonus’s state of eternal withering. Soon this vision disappears, as Tithonus is incapable of experiencing long intervals of vision. Eos sheds tears for him since Tithonus has lost his power of vision and can only experience it in short spurts of memory. Tithonus then experiences a second vision full of vivid lively images. He remembers Eos and himself and how their relationship was full of poetic love, wildness and sweetness, similar to wildness and sweetness of Homer’s *Iliad*, which now in his blind present state seems like a strange song because his power of vision and imagination are now only a memory. He can no longer discern the sublime voice of such literature. His dilemma is still that of “the fools of habit” of the Victorian age ruled by Utilitarianism, which either attempts to “relegate” poetry, “incorporate” it (on its own terms) or “marginalize it (Sinfield 17). However, there is an undertone of hope, since Tithonus still can experience intervals of vision, which can soothe him no matter how short they are. In fact the poem ends on a note of hope since the power of imagination still renews our sense of beauty every day, empowering us with vision when we allow ourselves to delve deeply in the beauty of nature, which surrounds us. However, once again the epiphanic moment invites a dialogic interpretation. Once again we are left in mystery as to its true significance, since a contradictory interpretation is equally possible. From a different perspective Tithonus’s epiphanic moment can be seen as a moment of enslavement, not liberation. Tithonus may be seen as one “held in bondage,” Johnson

says: "Eos stands for the Keatsian ideal of beauty which holds the poet in bondage" (13). Moreover, what is most disturbing about Tithonus's "bondage" is that the goddess under whose control he is under, is powerless. Harris comments on this saying that Tithonus is held in bondage to a goddess "whose speechlessness corresponds with her powerlessness to alter destiny" (Harris, 24).

Again in this poem we can trace two discourses dialogically troubling one another: the discourse of Victorian Utilitarianism (indicated through its superficial slogan "the greatest happiness for the greatest number," echoed in a slightly different format here, "as is most meet for all") and the discourse of Keats's Romantic sensuality. In a typically Utilitarian voice Tithonus states,

Why should a man desire in any way
To vary from the kindly race of men,
Or pass beyond the goal of ordinance
Where all should pause, as is most meet for all? (28-31)

Two phrases in these lines best depict the ideal of Utilitarian bourgeois hegemony, "the goal of ordinance" and "as is most meet for all". Both these phrases symbolically foreground the importance of achieving middle-class hegemony. One should not attempt to be different, "To vary from the kindly race." On another level we can discern Keatsian Romantic ideals such as the notion of beauty, which holds the poet in bondage. Furthermore, we can clearly distinguish Keats's often sensual style in phrases such as: "felt my blood / Glow with the glow that slowly crimson'd all" and "With kisses balmier than half-opening buds / Of April" (55-60).

The poem begins by evoking a marginal space. Tithonus the isolated protagonist in this poem begins by lamenting his inability to die. At the outset of the poem he envies the decay of woods, the fall of rain and the death of man. We are struck by his oxymoronic statement "Me only cruel immortality consumes" (5-6). Tithonus describes himself as decaying and withering, which stresses how his suffering is uniquely slow and continuous, making it more unbearable. He also refers to himself as "marred" and "maim'd" which delineates how the dubious gift of an exceptional existence has deeply injured him (19-20). He lives to see all those around him enjoying their youth, and is constantly aware of his own age, which arouses in him deep pain. Tithonus no longer feels real since he has no role to play in life and becomes a "shadow roaming like a dream" (8). He only begins to feel real when he transfers himself to the realm of imagination through liminal epiphany.

In analyzing the death paradigm and its inversion in "Tithonus" we recognize in Tithonus's inability to prolong liminal epiphanic moments a common Romantic dilemma, which laments a perfect inspiration lost in expression. However, Tithonus's liminal moment is related to sensual pleasure alone, not to a cultural vision or perspective of society. Unlike Arthur and Ulysses whose liminal moments are related to a poetic epic vision of society, Tithonus's liminal moment is an immersion in the sensual pleasures.

"Tithonus" is a good transitional point for my next discussion: women's deaths in Tennyson. Through a study of the death paradigm of women we can perhaps better understand "Tithonus" and Tennyson's symbolic use of the death experience as a whole. We can trace the same inverted paradigm of death in relation to emblematic women's

death in the poems "The Dying Swan," "The Lady of Shalott," "Elaine," "Oenone," "The Death of Oenone" and "The Lord of Burleigh".

Endnotes

¹ By culture hero I mean “a mythical or mythicized historical figure who embodies the aspirations or ideals of a society.”

Chapter 3: Dead Women As Cultural Signs

In the last scene of the Elizabeth Taylor film Cleopatra, which was directed by Joseph Mankiewicz, a Roman soldier asks Cleopatra's servant if Cleopatra's death was well done by her, and the servant answers: "Extremely well as befitting the last of so many noble rulers". In this scene Cleopatra is completely embellished with gold and the film ends by capturing her magnificent dead body and then fading away. Though both Mark Anthony and Caesar also die in this film their dead bodies are not made a spectacle in the same manner as is Cleopatra's dead body. Though this may simply be due to the different burial rituals of ancient Romans and ancient Egyptians, I still believe it is a good example of the aesthetic obsession with female death. Furthermore, the servant's description of this elaborate death as the ultimate goal further strengthens my argument. The phrase "as befitting the last of so many noble rulers" draws our attention to the fact that Cleopatra's elaborately dressed corpse becomes a marker for the deaths of all rulers before her. Elizabeth Bronfen refers to the artistic tendency to treat female death in western culture symbolically, saying, "death and femininity serve as ciphers for other values, as privileged tropes" (xi). In the nineteenth century the dying woman and the suicidal woman constructed a large part of the artistic imagination. Bronfen quotes Higonnet on this subject:

Choice of death is one of the nineteenth century's privileged tropes for a denial of woman's ability to choose freely during her life and for the constraints and incisions imposed on her due to the cultural construction of femininity over her body. Since the feminine body is the cause for

constraints, the only freedom of choice open to her is to eradicate the body. (qtd. in Bronfen 153)

By looking at Tennyson's poems which portray the deaths of legendary and folkloric women we can further analyze this artistic tendency to make a spectacle of women's death and to represent it as the only means of freedom for women. Furthermore, we shall see how women themselves play a role in making themselves a spectacle and what Bronfen calls a "cipher" (xi). As in the poems dealing with legendary men's deaths, where death becomes symbolic of lament for lost cultural and artistic values, legendary women's deaths in Tennyson are also culturally symbolic. There are of course important affinities among all of Tennyson's liminal epiphanic death poems, regardless of gender considerations. They confirm that death in Tennyson's poems about dying culture heroes or emblematic female heroines is in both cases tropic. However, there are certain consistent differences that arise when the dying symbolic figure is a female rather than a male.

In the preceding chapter, which dealt with laments for dying cultural heroes, I described the Tennysonian death paradigm, governing the death of Tennyson's cultural heroes. It became clear that Tennyson seems reluctant to describe the men actually dying but persistently prefers instead to assign them an indefinite ending with a distinct possibility of return. He utilizes the technique of epiphany to liberate his male personas from consignment to actual death, since the liminal moment propels them into an eternal marginal existence. In other words, Tennyson does not really allow his male personas to die, since they move from the cultural or social centre to the liminal and finally reside in

the marginal where they avoid the spectacle of final death and definite burial that we shall see in the case of Tennyson's women. As we have seen in the men's death poems discussed in the previous chapter, very little or no attention is devoted, for example, to scenes of dying or to description of the graveyard scenes. However, in Tennyson's poems dealing with emblematic women's death the death paradigm is inverted. Emblematic women move towards death in the opposite direction: from the marginal domain, through the liminal, and finally to the centre where their death is final and made a spectacle. Hence the liminal epiphany for the legendary female characters turns out to be more restrictive than liberating. In accordance with Bakhtin's definition of the liminal chronotope, the liminal epiphany for Tennyson's legendary female personas is referred to as "chronotope of crisis and break in a life" (248). However, this "crisis and break" lacks the enlightening hopeful aura of the liminal epiphanies of the dying male cultural heroes.

In his essay "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes toward a Historical Poetics," Bakhtin refers to the chronotope of the threshold, a chronotope which is "highly charged with emotion and value [...] the chronotope of crisis and break in a life" (248). By looking at Tennyson's use of this highly charged liminal epiphanic moment in the poems "The Dying Swan," "The Lady of Shalott," "Elaine," "Oenone" and "The Death of Oenone" and "The Lord of Burleigh" we can trace Tennyson's use of femininity as a mask for a Romantic poetic self he wishes to evade. Perhaps this is one way he distances himself from the accusation of having a feminine poetic sensibility, by portraying it as dead. Another possible interpretation of Tennyson's choice of female surrogates is explained by Hassett and Richardson: "What Keats and Tennyson see in

female surrogates is their own dissolution, the swooning receptivity that is the very process of their poetry of sensation” (297).

Any study of the representation of women or women’s experience in Tennyson’s poetry is of course immediately complicated by the subject’s controversial variability and ambiguity. Critical dispute continues about whether Tennyson’s use of femaleness as a poetic trope is on the whole misogynist or at least appropriative or, on the other hand, sympathetic. Alan Richardson deals at length with the Romantic tendency of appropriation of the feminine voice, going so far as to describe Romantic poets as “figuratively cannibalizing their nearest female relatives in the process” (21). From the very title of Richardson’s essay, “Romanticism and the Colonization of the Feminine,” we get a sense of the degree of appropriation involved. Richardson argues that “Romantic tradition did not simply objectify women. It also subjected them, in a dual sense, portraying woman as subject in order to appropriate the feminine for male subjectivity” (22). Tennyson follows this same Romantic tendency by feminizing his poetic sensibility. Moreover, Tennyson lived in an age when critics like Alfred Austin attacked him for his “feminine, narrow, domesticated, timorous” poetry (The Victorian Poet 124). He attempted to evade this feminine poetic sensibility by portraying it in the finality of women’s death in his poems, which delineate women’s death as a cultural sign. Tennyson could not openly adhere to Romanticism because he himself was not a complete Romantic. After all as James Eli Adams argues, “In well-known debates about ‘the place of poetry,’ early Victorian responses to the legacy of romanticism left lyric poetry

divided between often conflicting imperatives: the gratification of a large audience—whether for instruction or pleasure - and fidelity to a unique selfhood” (Adams 44).

Issues surrounding Tennyson’s representation of women can be divided briefly into two critical camps. Typifying the feminist objection is Shuli Barzilai who sees the tower only as the imprisoning attitudes of society and deems that Tennyson in female death poems like “The Lady of Shalott,” merely constructs women as lovely faces only (231-232). The contrary view is perhaps well illustrated in Roger Platizky’s argument about whether Tennyson’s “angel in the house” in the poem “Romney’s Remorse” is “candy-coated or opiate-laced” (427). He reaches the conclusion that Tennyson’s representation of women is two-sided, since he alternately portrays woman as both angel and harlot. I would like to extend this view of the duality of Tennyson’s vision of women to the poems in which Tennyson embodies women’s deaths as cultural signs, replacing Platizky’s use of the term “harlot” with the term “witch” since Tennyson’s emblematic dead women are characterized more by having fearful powers than sexual freedom. Nina Auerbach deals with this very issue, arguing that in Tennyson’s age “women exist only as spiritual extremes: there is no human norm of womanhood, for she has no home on earth, but only among divine and demonic essences” (64). However, for the particular purpose of my study I shall try to concentrate on a third gender signification: Tennyson’s utilization of the mask of dying femininity as a means to evade a Romantic feminine poetic sensibility he is reluctant to proclaim. This is why he prefers to express his poetic sensibility ambiguously in the form of the image of the highborn maiden embarking on a

death journey as in “The Lady of Shalott” and “Elaine” or the doomed wife as in “Oenone,” “The Death of Oenone” and “The Lord of Burleigh”.

In all these poems dealing with emblematic women’s death we can trace the Romantic (feminine) and Anti-Romantic masculine tension within Tennyson. Clinton Machann comments on Tennyson’s queasiness with being considered a Romantic due to gender implications, saying, “From the beginning of his career Tennyson was sensitive to his own ambiguous social status as a male poet in the Romantic tradition, associated with the suspiciously feminized qualities of imaginative inwardness, emotive openness” (205). Moreover, we can study Tennyson’s dual vision of the female as both angel and witch and analyze through his portrayal of female emblematic death the coded stereotypes of the female as object even in the face of death. Concentrating on the epiphanic moments of these dead heroines can be very helpful in such tasks.

Like In Memoriam, Tennyson’s fullest treatments of emblematic women’s death: “The Lady of Shalott,” “Elaine,” “Oenone,” “The Death of Oenone,” “The Dying Swan” and “The Lord of Burleigh” are poems which problematise the notion of death and its symbolic possibilities. I am motivated to include them in my study because the liminal moment in them represents a complete contrast with the liminal epiphanic moment in In Memoriam. In fact the liminal moments in these poems are so oblique that studying them in contrast to the evolution of the epiphanic moment in In Memoriam helps to reveal their presence and implications. The epiphanic moment in In Memoriam is a liberating revelatory moment, which is experienced doubtfully in a flash and which then returns the poet back to harsh reality. In the poems dealing with emblematic women’s death, the

liminal epiphany propels them into the outside world, encourages them to cross limits but ends there, rendering death rather than return the final destiny. The liminal zone in these poems, which is often the space of the river or the path, is the “crisis and break in life” referred to by Bakhtin (248).

We can trace in these poems three distinct stages: the initial female space of isolation, alienation and artistic creation, the liminal space of transgression, and then finally the space of fatal reinscription into society upon return to the centre. “The Dying Swan” is an early poem written by Tennyson, which establishes this female death pattern. In this frankly symbolic poem the fact that women’s defeat is final is dealt with, through the description of the swan’s death journey en route from society’s margins (in the country) to the cultural centre (the city). The three stages of emblematic female death are brought together in this poem about a female swan. Her journey of death begins from a marginal space. This peripheral space is “wild and bare, / Wide, wild, and open to the air,” typical of the wildness and isolation that is typical of the paradigm (1-2). Next begins the description of the swan’s liminal experience moving downstream on the river. This epiphanic moment satisfies Bidney’s description of the characteristic aspects of Tennyson’s liminal epiphanies: “brightness,” “expansiveness” and “mysteriousness”. The moment of liminal epiphany takes place on the river as “ The tangled water-courses slept, / Shot over with purple, and green, and yellow” (19-20). With this bright moment of colour, “The wild swan’s death-hymn took the soul” (21). The moment is “expansive” because it can be interpreted with implications that “mean far more than its limitedness in

time and space" (2). Hence, the situation here reaches far beyond the death of a single swan. Moreover, we can relate this swan to a Romantic poetic sensibility since it comes from a marginal isolated domain like Shelley's maid in the tower in "To a Skylark" and it is related to musical poetic expression since she is described as singing a "death-hymn" "carol free" with an "awful jubilant voice" (7-28). This moment is "mysterious" because swans in western literary tradition sing only at their death. Ferber states that this is a common belief in western literary culture: "Seneca can allude to the sweetness of a swan's last song" and Shakespeare in *Lucrece* says, "And now this pale swan in her wat'ry nest / Begins the sad dirge of her certain ending" (215). The swan's death journey ends with her arrival at the centre: "Through the open gates of the city afar" (34). We notice that as she nears the city her voice rises to become a "carol free", which hints at the fact that this last song is joyous and meaningful in some unexplained way (30). Like a last crescendo at the end of a symphony, her voice is compared to the joy of a mighty people with "shawms," "cymbals" and "harps of gold" (32). Not much description of the state of the centre is provided, but we get a sense that it is a place detrimental to the life of the swan and Romantic poet figure. She is only able to sing in the liminal space of the river and her voice can only echo in the city. And yet the city seems to be a place which needs her low "warble" to become "a carol free and bold" gaining meaning and strength as she nears the city (24-30). Those dwelling in the city are in need of the carol sung by the poet figure, though ironically her journey to the centre is deathly. Death is her unavoidable end and there is no hope of her recovery or return. A death journey on a river

also plays an essential role in "The Lady of Shalott" which also follows the same death paradigm of journey from the marginal through the liminal ending at the centre.

The tower is a marginal space related to isolation and poetic creation. P.B. Shelley's poem "To A Skylark" relates the song of the skylark to both "a poet hidden/In the light of thought, /Singing hymns unbidden," and "a high-born maiden/In a palace tower, /Soothing her love-laden/ Soul in secret hour"(The Works 45-54). Hence, we can see the connection between Romantic poetic creation and the image of the maiden in the isolated tower. We can therefore claim that Shelley's Romantic vision of the poet in this poem is related to withdrawal from society, in the sense of commenting upon it from a distance. Shelley refers to the poet's isolation in society in "The Defence" saying, "A Poet is a nightingale, who sits in darkness and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sounds; his auditors are as men entranced by the melody of unseen musicians" (11). Tennyson seems to appropriate the voice of this Romantic isolated maiden in "The Lady of Shalott". However, this was troubling for Tennyson because, as Clinton Machann argues, "Tennyson was sensitive to his own ambiguous social status as a male poet in the Romantic tradition, associated with the suspiciously feminized qualities of imaginative inwardness, emotive openness" (205). In light of this, I find it interesting that if women in these poems are Tennyson's mask for his Romantic poetic sensibility the fact that he allows this sensibility in the end to die suggests a pessimistic or tragic sense of poetry's efficacy in Victorian bourgeois culture which either, "relegate[s], incorporate[s] [on its own terms or] marginalize[s]" poetry (Sinfield 17). In "The Dying Swan" the description of the tower stage is not included. However, in "The Lady of Shalott," "Elaine,"

“Oenone,” “The Death of Oenone” and “The Lord of Burleigh” this stage is described in detail.

The Lady of Shalott

In “The Lady of Shalott” the sense of isolation is foregrounded. Her tower is situated on an island (“The island of Shalott”) that further increases the sense of isolation (9). The description of her abode seems rather bleak and lacking in lively activity as the text refers to the abode as consisting of “four gray walls, and four gray towers” in “the silent isle” (15). Yet, there is an evident contrast here between the bleak isolated descriptions of the tower and the singing of the Lady that “echoes cheerly” (30). We begin to wonder in suspense what would make one sing so cheerfully in such a bleak abode. Furthermore, her isolation in the tower makes her existence unknown to others: “who hath seen her wave her hand?” “Or is she known in all the land” (24-26). The Lady’s life and work are represented as those of an artist and poet: she sings and weaves. The weaving has especially interesting and ambiguous implications.

In part 2 of the poem a full description of her life of weaving in the tower is given. The Lady’s weaving can be interpreted on many different levels. It is a domestic art that is also related to writing. Michael Ferber discusses the symbolic significance of spinning saying that spinning and weaving in classical literature are chiefly feminine occupations in which women both mortal and divine were involved. Furthermore, the Greek verb hyphainein meaning to weave is also used to refer to the governance of words. In the Odyssey Menelaus and Odysseus weave their speech. Also, the greatest

spinners in classical literature are the Fates. The Fates or Moirai appear in the Iliad and are referred to as spinning events (228-230). Hence, the Lady's weaving can be interpreted on three different levels. First, it can be seen as a domestic action like Penelope's weaving of her shroud as she awaits the return of Odysseus; this can be considered a death in life state, since she occupies her time with the weaving of her death shroud. In another light, weaving is also an artistic activity since "she weaves by night and day/ A magic web of colors gay" (37-38). Finally, the weaving may be interpreted as the weaving of Fate; yet unlike the goddesses of Fate she weaves her own Fate, not the Fate of others as the weaving she carries out in the tower is considered her whole existence. However, though the tower and the weaving may be considered a barrier they do not prevent her awareness of and desire for the outside world of action. Barzilai comments on this: "the tower may provide a barrier but does not predicate indifference to romance" (234). Hence, the Lady upon seeing in her mirror the lovers lately wed says, "I am half-sick of shadows" (71-72). I, however, would like to add that it is not only the romance, which attracts the Lady, but rather the wish to experience life rather than watching it from afar. It is the attempt of the poet to connect his art with life. Seeing the newly wed lovers was the culminating scene that instigated her dissatisfaction with her isolated existence, but she had seen several other "shadows" in the mirror before that, which aroused within her a preliminary sense of dissatisfaction:

Shadows of the world appear.

There she sees the highway near [...]

And there the surly village-churls,

And the red cloaks of market girls,[...]

Sometimes a troop of damsels glad,

An abbot on an ambling pad,

Sometimes a curly shepherd-lad. (48-57)

In this lies the basic connection between the Lady's experience of isolation and the poet's experience of isolation and the general destructive effect the world has on both of them. We glean a sense of satisfaction with this isolated existence through the lines "little care hath she" in her tower as she "delights/ To weave the mirror's magic sights" (64-65). Yet, she becomes "half-sick" of this shadowy existence even before she sees Lancelot. Hence, we feel that the real issue here is not only romantic love but also the separation between art and life. Instead of a life of isolation an attempt is made to connect with life. Here we can translate the text's attempt to express the paradoxical notion that poetry cannot withdraw from the world even though it kills the aesthetic notion of poetry to connect with the world. This is why liminal epiphanic chronotopes such as the river provide an ideal occasion from an aesthetic-poetic point of view since they allow the poet to experience life, yet through an epiphanic altered state of consciousness. However, with the emblematic female personae this epiphanic experience is never hopeful or liberating because its end is reincorporation within the codes of a society which objectifies women.

The sight of Lancelot instigates the Lady's epiphanic experience. However, what is interesting here is that what attracts the Lady to Lancelot is his chivalric adventurous character: "A red-cross knight forever kneel'd/ To a lady in his shield" (78-79). This chivalric identity is further proliferated in the detailed description of his knightly attire.

With great detail the “bridle,” “bridle bells,” “bugle,” “saddle leather,” “helmet” and “helmet-feather” are all described (82-93). Her state of consciousness becomes altered during her concentration on Lancelot’s adventurous attire as “The helmet and the helmet-feather/ Burn’d like one burning flame together” (93-94). Again Bidney’s distinguishing characteristics of Tennyson’s epiphanies – “flashing,” “mystery” and “expansiveness”-pertain (2). We notice how Lancelot’s gear is described in the “flashing” language characteristic of Tennyson’s epiphanic moments. Furthermore, a direct connection between her identity embodied in the blooming of the “water lily” since she is the lily-maid and the epiphanic experience “the helmet and the plume” is made (111-112). This is emphasized by the order given to these constituents of her experience before she breaks the spell and looks out of the window: “She saw the water-lily bloom,/ She saw the helmet and the plume,/ She look’d down to Camelot” (111-113). The whole poem seems to build up to this moment when the Lady discovers that her life is no longer satisfactory and wonders whether she may have a place in the outside world. Hence, it is a rather revelatory moment for her. It is also a mysterious moment because of “the inexplicability at the heart of the epiphanic experience: the inner power that the vision conveys” (Bidney 2). This explains why the Lady upon seeing Lancelot the adventurous figure suddenly acquires the “inner power” to break the spell. We can also refer to it as expansive because it “seems to mean far more than its limitedness in time and space”; the decision to leave the tower symbolizes a different course of life connected to activity rather than passivity and actually costs her, her life (Bidney 2). Barzilai comments on the Lady’s choice of a life of activity, saying, “the Lady precipitously turns from her loom toward life and the

flashing armored figure of Lancelot. But what awaits her on the outside is yet another death" (232). Lancelot's adventurous life is the "other," which she strives for through epiphany. He is for her the culmination of the struggle between art and life or a passive and an active existence. Bidney discusses the Lady's epiphanic moment:

Paying the price of having looked out the window to see Apollonian Lancelot, the Lady dies, as it were, into the dawn of her sun-idol. They are not truly united, however, for Lancelot sees the Lady but an instant as her boat carries her to Camelot, and his indifferent- seeming words darken the grim moment of their funeral encounter. (95)

Through the liminal setting of the river the Lady enjoys for the first time the power of writing her identity: "And round about the prow she wrote The Lady of Shalott" (125). However, the atmosphere surrounding her seems to be one of anarchy: "stormy," "woods were waning," "banks complaining," "sky raining" (119-121). It is almost as if all her surroundings are against her action because she has broken the spell which divides art and life, the private feminine domain and the male domain of action. Her state is compared to the state of one who is in an altered state of consciousness, as the text describes her as "Like some bold seer in a trance" (128). In the boat on the river experiencing an altered state of consciousness she fulfills the dream which epiphany instigated in her, as she is able to join her poetic existence with actual life, setting aside the isolated female space. Though she has left her loom behind, her former instrument of art, her voice now becomes her poetic instrument. In this state in the boat she is able to sing her "swan song". Everyone can hear her clearly now; she is no longer only heard by

the reapers. Her song is described as a “carol, mournful, holy” calling our attention to its sadness and revered status (145). Furthermore, the manner with which she delivers it is quite significant; it is “Chanted loudly, chanted lowly,” manifesting a strength and perseverance as she keeps singing till “her eyes were darken’d wholly” (148). Furthermore, she remains alive in song all the while on the river and does not die till she reaches “The first house by the water-side” (151). Also, she does not die silently, but “Singing in her song” (152). On one level she is liberated, but her epiphany leads to her death.

Though the Lady is symbolic of Tennyson’s Romantic poetic sensibility, he is unwilling or unable to bequeath her a completely emancipatory poetic experience. This is probably due to his divided attitude towards the Romantic tradition she represents that is embodied in her “suspiciously feminized qualities of imaginative inwardness (and) emotive openness” (Machann 205). In addition, women in Tennyson’s poetry symbolize two contradictory visions: the witch and the angel. Tennyson hence, could only portray women as extremes. Nina Auerbach comments on the governing imaginative tendency in Tennyson’s age to represent women as extremes saying, “women exist only as spiritual extremes” (64). This imaginative scheme does not place credence in a human woman. Moreover, every female angel figure has within her the seeds of the demonic. Nina Auerbach’s interpretation of Walter Crane’s illustration “Pure Womanhood and undiluted monsterhood” hints at this since she finds Crane’s piece to be illustrative of, “a covert, affectionate complicity between the female’s decorum and the monster’s assault” (65).

Finally, the last stage of the paradigm of women's death, which is reinscription into the social centre, is described. Tennyson desires and dreads the Lady's transition from the tower to Camelot. "Shalott is a yearning imagination whose transition 'from the region of shadows into that of realities' (as Tennyson himself put it), is both desired and dreaded" (Hassett and Richardson 295). The Lady floats to Camelot and she now becomes the centre of society's gaze in contrast to her state before when she was beyond their interpretation in the marginalized tower. Bronfen argues in her discussion of the poem "Elaine": "The court's response is to undo the uncanniness of this intermediary arrestation of death replacing Elaine's iconic recoding with complete retextualization" (156). Hence, her dead body becomes a sheet of paper upon which the people of Camelot write their questions and interpretations. They ask, "Who is this? And what is here?" (163). Then they decide to interpret her as an object to be feared. Upon seeing her dead body, "royal cheer" dies away and the people "cross'd themselves for fear" (166). However, the reaction of Lancelot to seeing the Lady is by far the most troubling and most false. Though his poetic knightly image is what supposedly first drove her from her marginal state, we realize that he also only reduces her to a spectacle or an object to gaze upon: "She has a lovely face; God in his mercy lend her grace" (169-170). The only reason for God to lend his grace to her given in these lines is related to her physical appearance, her "lovely face" (169). No one discerns the poetic nature of her existence in the tower or her liminal epiphanic experience on the river or her need to experience a life of action. Any intellectual activity that might have driven her to this state is set aside as she is reduced to a mere "lovely face"(169).

Hence, we cannot simply claim that the Lady was a “Rapunzel” in despair, who was saved from her desolate existence by Lancelot’s image, as Shuli Barzilai argues because of Tennyson’s dialogic portrayal of the female as both source of inspiration and source of chaos (236-239). Though the Lady leaves her ivory tower of isolation, it is also the tower of poetic artistic creation; there she sits like Shelley’s “poet hidden / In the light of thought, / Singing hymns unbidden” (The Works, 45-47). On one level, we can interpret her life in the tower as a life of creative activity. On another, we can also see her desertion of the tower as emancipation and her consequent death as the only free choice she has ever made. Hence, Tennyson plays with two images of women here: woman as the source of artistic creation and woman as the source of threatening power. Both these notions of femininity are delineated in In Memoriam in poems 56 and 103 where the feminine is alternately displayed as a shrieking demolishing force and an inspirational power. This echoes Auerbach’s argument with regards to the “equal facility” with which “the Victorian angel becomes demonic” (63)

Glancing briefly back at In Memoriam, lyric 103, we can trace the image of female as inspirational power. In lyric 103 the poet through the “threshold” of sleep is able to join his object of desire and experience a dream vision rather than epiphany. The medium which actuates this for him is poetry, as he is in a hall “where” “harp and carol rang” (9). He also refers clearly here to a feminine source of inspiration, the muses. He stands surrounded by the muses who sing to his object of desire, which remains veiled to him. He is then summoned to sea and is led by the muses to a boat. This boat journey here could be indicative of the mental journey he is about to undertake. The further he

gets from the shore the more he gains a mythic presence similar to that of “Anakim” or “Titan” (31-32). The poetic songs of war, history and astronomy sung by the muses instigate this transformation, which overcomes him. However, when he reaches the ship, which carries the object of his desire, he forsakes the muses and does not answer their calls. Hence, when he reaches the object of his search he discards this feminine source of inspiration in a manner similar to that with which he feminizes his Romantic poetic sensibility in the legendary female poems dealing with death and allowing it to die.

In lyric 56 we are introduced to the image of the female as a demolishing fearful force. Nature’s arbitrary natural selection is compared to the capriciousness of a demonic woman. After all, natural selection is an arbitrary process, which seems to be ungoverned by rules. The fact that love is creation’s final law is also questioned, since female Nature is portrayed as a predatory creature “red in tooth and claw”(15). The portrayal of nature as a woman here is visually grotesque as we imagine, the blood staining the teeth and claws of a bloodthirsty nature. He further concretizes this gory image by adding an auditory aspect as he refers to how nature “With ravine shrieked against his creed” (16). All of these frightening descriptions underscore Tennyson’s depiction of women in this case as an arbitrary source of fearful destruction.

From this dual image of the female as both source of inspiration angel and source of fearful power witch springs the dialogic attitude towards the Lady in “The Lady of Shalott.” She may be interpreted both as a Romantic isolated artist and by the people of Camelot and the dominant ideology as a witch figure that is worthy of fear.

Elaine

In "Elaine" the finality of the deaths of culturally symbolic women is further proliferated through the detailed description of Elaine's corpse and grave and the need to reinscribe the feminine source of fearful power into society, a need that is absent from the legendary male death poems. In "Elaine," Tennyson chooses to retell the death story of "The Lady of Shalott" once more. Tennyson did not know that the Lady whom he wrote about in 1830 when he read the "Centio Novelle Antiche" was Elaine of Arthurian legend (Hasset and Richardson 287). "Elaine" was written around 1858, and though it basically portrays the same tale of death we can trace in its proliferation a development in Tennyson's attitude to art, life and death the basic motifs of "The Lady of Shalott." Constance Hasset and James Richardson comment upon Tennyson's difference of attitude towards characterization in "The Lady of Shalott" and "Elaine," saying, "in 'Lancelot and Elaine' we are encouraged not to inhabit characters as self-projections, but to see them from the outside, as we would in society, or even in the market place" (300). It is this sense of detachment that distinguishes "Elaine" from "The Lady of Shalott." Elaine is in many ways similar to and yet different from the Lady of 1830. Both Elaine and the Lady begin their journey towards death from the marginal domain of the tower.

Similar to the Lady's creative weaving in the tower, Elaine's sewing of a silk cover for Lancelot's shield can also be interpreted as a creative activity. The silk cover is her fictitious interpretation of the shield that she uses to cover its brutal reality as an instrument of warfare. The silk shield cover may be seen as an example of Elaine's poetic interpretation of the chivalric knight's role. In the typical medieval chivalric manner she

lovingly describes the shield and duplicates the emblem upon it on the cover: "Then fearing rust or soilure, fashion'd for it/ A case of silk, and braided thereupon/ All the devices blazon'd on the shield/ In their own tinct, and added, of her wit, / A border fantasy of branch and flower" (6-11). It is worth noting that her only innovation is the addition of the frame. She does not attempt to re-invent this emblem, which is the illusory identity of the most chivalric knight and disregards any less savoury aspects of his character. Hence, Elaine spends her days and all her intellectual activity enraptured by her own poetic construction of the noblest knight of all. Unlike the Lady, whose artistic creation in the tower was not exclusively governed by the chivalric knight's image but also included other scenes dealing with several aspects of life, all of Elaine's artistic activity revolves around the poetic chivalric knight image which in itself is an illusion: "so she lived in fantasy" (27). This phrase "so she lived in fantasy" is repeated twice in the poem, drawing our attention to the fictitious value of her existence in the tower. Her earlier marginalized existence in the tower may be interpreted on two dialogic levels. On one level, it may be indicative of personal artistic freedom to experience life from one's own perspective. On another level, it may be indicative of the restricted existence of an objectified female whose notions and beliefs are themselves constructed by a society which worships heroes. In both cases an attempt is made to cross the boundaries of isolation. In both cases Tennyson chooses to portray the consequences as fatal.

In this tower stage of Elaine's inevitable death journey, Elaine represents the first half of Tennyson's dual notion of women, the angel figure:

Meeker than any child to a rough nurse,

Milder than any mother to a sick child,
And never woman yet, since man's first fall,
Did kindlier unto man. (852-855)

Ward Hellstrom comments upon the portrayal of Elaine as an angel figure in contrast to Guinevere, saying, "When [Lancelot] chooses Guinevere rather than Elaine, he has rather clearly chosen the rose rather than the lily, the flesh over the spirit" (119). However, it is worth noting here that it is not really the flesh that Lancelot chooses, since woman is not represented as human but as rather angelic or demonic. Moreover, as an embodiment of Tennyson's Romantic poetic sensibility Elaine is portrayed in a much less attractive light than the Lady, which signifies an increasing attempt on the part of Tennyson to evade a feminized Romantic poetic sensibility. With Elaine's liminal epiphany and her choice to cross barriers she switches roles from angel to fearful demonic power.

Elaine's decision to ride upon the river is indicative of the wish to cross barriers and limits in order to attain her particular object of desire, Lancelot. It is also the death wish, which is her liminal epiphany: "the blood-red light of dawn / Flared on her face, she shrilling 'Let me die'" (1018-1019). These lines occur where she decides to board the river which represents the liminal epiphanic stage of her death paradigm. These lines describing her decision have all the flashing qualities of Tennyson's epiphanies: "the blood-red light" "flared" (1018). Furthermore, it is an "expansive" moment as it extends into the future and controls her future fate. Moreover, it is also mysterious because there is "inexplicability at the heart of the epiphanic experience" (Bidney 2). We do not completely understand the power of the vision imparted upon Elaine since it occurs

suddenly. She suddenly acquires a degree of control and power over the remainder of her life which she lacked before.

The river is a liminal epiphanic space, which also symbolizes limits and barriers. The river has always been a barrier for Elaine because her brothers would not allow her to cross it: "Only you would not pass beyond the cape / That has the poplar on it: there you fixt / Your limit; oft returning with the tide" (1032-1034). Crossing the river is a dream of hers connected to having her own will: "Now shall I have my will" (1040). As part of having her own will she orchestrates the minutest details of her death and chooses a water burial. This is quite ironic because though Elaine assumes that she will be attaining what she wills through this orchestration of her death - decking herself as the queen, writing the letter and going to Camelot - she is actually making a spectacle of herself and going to the centre of society where her death will be reinterpreted and the dangerousness of her female body contained and controlled through earthen burial. However, she is choosing to make her body a spectacle. Bronfen comments on this saying, "Though bodies in culture are always inscribed by exterior signifiers, it matters whether these external inscriptions are chosen [...] Authenticity and autonomy enter at precisely the moment she 'realises herself' by taking on the position of agent of the action that turns the body into a sign" (154). Furthermore, she strongly wishes her dead body to speak for itself. Hence, her choice to be accompanied only by a dumb old man is intentional. Elaine hence says, "There surely I shall speak for mine own self, / And none of you can speak for me so well"(1118-1119). However, this is a naïve assumption because she is going to the centre of society where the discourse of Camelot's culture

will overwhelm and reinterpret her. Bronfen explains this saying, “The court’s response is to undo the uncanniness of (Elaine’s) intermediary arrestion of death by replacing Elaine’s recoding with complete retextualisation”(156). Though she assumes that she will overcome possible different interpretations of her death by making her body a text of her self-chosen death, society instantly explains her death in terms of Lancelot’s role played in it and buries her in the conventional manner. Elizabeth Bronfen comments on Elaine’s manner of choice of death, saying, “By transforming suicide into an act of self-textualization, Elaine at last controls her own life and insists on the public recognition of her love denied to her during her lifetime” (153). However, this act of self-textualization backfires upon Elaine with her entry into the centre, which instantly reinscribes her.

With the very arrival of her body at the centre in court, attempts to recode and retextualize her death begin. All of these attempts seem to frantically aim at recontaining Elaine and controlling the autonomous nature of her act. Lancelot explains her act in terms completely connected to himself: “I left her and I bad her no farewell; / Though, had I dreamt the damsel would have died, / I might have put my wits to some rough use” (1295-1297). However, though he was a source of instigation for her death in the liminal moment, we realize it is more about personal choice, than about love, since she says, “Now shall I have my will” (1040). Moreover, Arthur feels that as compensation for Lancelot’s treatment of her she should “be buried worshipfully” when in fact her death was in reality self-chosen, not something that Lancelot was completely responsible for (1318). As a Romantic Shelleyan secluded poetic figure, she lived in artistic isolation in the tower. With her liminal epiphanic moment she is propelled into a more autonomous

existence both as an artist and as a female. She hence now experiences direct contact with reality. She takes control of her body and fate through writing, which takes the form of a letter and chooses to cross the boundaries that were a source of constraint by crossing the river. The outcome is somewhat similar to the dying cultural heroes who always disappear in the horizon with the hope of return, such as Arthur and Ulysses, or are portrayed in an eternal domain, like Tithonus. However, with the women characters this is not completely the case since they are never described in terms which indicate a significant reinterpretation of the legend. Though it is possible to argue that Tennyson is merely following the structural outline of the story of Elaine, as a poet, he has the power to neglect and highlight what parts he chooses as he is not merely retelling these tales but shaping them as a cultural critique of his age. Hallam Tennyson felt it necessary to explain his father's modernization of legendary material, saying, "he has made the old legends his own, restored the idealism, and infused into them a spirit of modern thought and ethical significance"(Hellstrom 91). However, we can sense through his description of legendary women's death he is less willing to reshape the constituents of the legend. This may be due to the fact that they embody a Romantic feminine poetic sensibility to which he is reluctant to openly adhere. This is why though Elaine chose to die on the barge floating on the water beyond containment, the court retextualizes Elaine's iconic coding of her body. Bronfen describes Elaine's iconic recoding by complete retextualization:

The court's response is to undo the uncanniness of this intermediary arrestation of death [...] In the manner of a second burial, putting closure

on the liminality Elaine entered as she floated from her father's house to her lover's dwelling place [...] The message of her body- text is translated to a gravestone that replaces her body. (156)

She is given a burial that she does not seek. She is buried "with gorgeous obsequies, / And mass and rolling music, like a Queen" (1324- 1325). Though this materialistic manner of treating her death seems to be similar to the manner with which she treated Lancelot's shield in the beginning, the fact that she does not seek such a rich burial and chooses to allow her body to float to Camelot signals a change in her perspective. She no longer highly values the external appearances of riches, but cares more about self-made choices. Everything related by others to her tomb is ordered to be costly, as if the materialistic grandeur of her tomb will contain the anarchy she has created. Her image is imprinted on her grave with her lily in hand and her story is carved in "letters gold and azure" (1334).

As the tale of the lily maid ends and Elaine is safely contained in the grave, Tennyson directs his view to Lancelot. He moves to the inner struggle within Lancelot with regard to his identity, which may echo Tennyson's struggle to come to terms with his own dual identity: "My own name shames me, seeming a reproach" (1392). The struggle is between the public poetic bard Victorian figure and the private Shelleyan Romantic figure. In these lines Tennyson expresses his queries with regard to his identity as a poet in an age that defined poetry on terms different from his own. By ending the poem dealing with Elaine's death with musings on identity we can discern his discarding of the feminine poetic sensibility in preference of a masculine sensibility embodied in

Lancelot. However, though he settles for the masculine poetic sensibility there are traces of dissatisfaction with it as is always the case with Tennyson since Lancelot groans in remorse and pain and wishes for an angel to seize him: "And fling (him) deep in that forgotten mere" (1415).

Oenone

Oenone is also an emblematic woman figure that dies, in a narrative that follows the same inverted death paradigm as *The Lady and Elaine*. Being similarly tropic of a feminized Romantic poetic sensibility, she too must die with no hope of return. Like Tennyson's other dying emblematic legendary heroines, her journey of death begins in the marginal domain. As in Elaine and Lancelot's case, Oenone dies in order to join Paris who is for her both an object of desire (since she awaits him) and hate (since he has forsaken her). He instigates her journey of death. In the two poems "Oenone" and "The Death of Oenone" we can readily trace the death journey from the margin, through the liminal and ending at the centre. The latter poem "The Death of Oenone" was written as a sequel to the first poem. The marginal and liminal stages are described in more detail in the 1833 poem "Oenone," while the centre is more dwelt on in "The Death of Oenone," written towards the end of Tennyson's career from August 1889 to July 1890. The fact that he used women as emblems from the beginning of his career to its end proves just how troubling the notion of a feminine Romantic sensibility was for Tennyson. By feminizing it and allowing it to die, Tennyson attempts to overcome this struggle that has been raging within him from the beginning of his career, a struggle between the private

Romantic poet and the public Victorian poet, “the two voices” (Smith 18). Like the isolated towers of *The Lady and Elaine*, Oenone’s lonely glen is the poetic marginal domain.

In the glen of “Ionian hills” and “valleys” the atmosphere is one of seclusion and death: “The grasshopper is silent in the grass:/ The lizard, with his shadow on the stone, / Rests like a shadow, and the winds are dead” (25-27). Within this secluded marginalized atmosphere dwells Oenone, described as “wandering forlorn” through the hills as she sings to “the stillness” (15-20). The connection between poetry and death is made here as Oenone stresses the fact that this is her swan song by repeating the line: “ Dear mother Ida, hearken ere I die” (23). This foregrounds the role of intense experiences like the desire for death, in creating a poet: “My sorrow with my song, as yonder walls / Rose slowly to a music slowly breathed” (39-40). Here we notice how the moments preceding death necessitate poetic expression. The role poetic expression plays in overcoming woe is shown through the repetition of verbs indicating utterance, like “harken,” “Hear me” and “I speak of it” (34-38). Moreover, the repetition of the refrain “O mother Ida” draws attention to the importance of the words which follow. She constantly reaffirms the importance of her words being listened to. We notice here the direct relation she creates with nature, since she calls the vale of Ida “mother Ida” referring to herself as a daughter of nature. After this description of Oenone’s marginalized existence, we move in a flashback to witness her liminal epiphanic moment.

Oenone’s epiphanic moment takes place as she witnesses Paris her husband as judge of the gods. The two goddesses whom Paris chooses between correspond to

dialogic discourses of the Victorian age as well as Tennyson's dual perspective of women as both angel and witch. Pallas Athene with her high morals and beliefs represents the angelic upright morals advocated by most Victorians, while Aphrodite represents the seductive witch figure. However, it is worth noting here that Oenone resembles neither of these two goddesses and that she is the focal figure of the poem, the poet figure that possesses prophetic power. Her liminal epiphanic moment can be referred to as fatal because it marks the beginning of death for the "maid in the tower" Romantic poetic sensibility, since it draws the poet figure Oenone eventually to the centre of society. It has all the characteristics of the liminal epiphanic moment, since it includes "flashing," "mystery" and "expansiveness"(Bidney 2). The flashing is traced in phrases such as, "silvery cloud," "brake like fire" and "golden cloud" (90-103). This moment is mysterious because there is "inexplicability at the heart" of this epiphanic experience (Bidney 2). We are incapable of understanding the inner power of vision, which overcomes Oenone as she watches her husband's judgment of the goddesses. It makes her see the importance of his judgment and its possible ramifications on their relationship: "I shut my sight for fear" (184). Furthermore, a sense of ominousness is present because Iris the goddess of strife is the one who gives the fruit to Paris. It is also an expansive moment because Paris's decision has a far-reaching effect, since Paris's choice of Aphrodite leads to the Trojan War. Athene represents the high ideals of the Victorian age: "Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control" (142). Aphrodite represents lust for the material: "I promise thee / The fairest and most loving wife in Greece" (182-183). Hence, Tennyson hints at the fact that neither discourse is the correct choice since the

ideal discourse is represented instead in the poetic, prophetic figure of Oenone. However, Paris does not choose the Romantic poetic sensibility of Oenone and discards her, instigating her eventual death with the advent of the liminal epiphanic moment. The very fact that this moment is portrayed as being fatal foregrounds once more how epiphanic discovery for Tennyson's emblematic female heroines is more confining than liberating. The epiphanic moment and its consequences drive her to the centre: "I will rise and go / Down into Troy" (257-258).

Several aspects of life at the centre are hinted at. It is an atmosphere vulnerable to strife, since Cassandra prophesies that there will be "fire" and "armed men" in Troy (260-261). Furthermore, life at the centre is clearly delineated as a threat to the marginal poetic life that exists within the embrace of nature in the "valleys," "slopes," "ravines" and "brook" (2-8). Life at the centre is portrayed as being exclusive and destructive to the poet's life on the margins. This is clarified through Oenone's description of the unidentified "they" who intrude upon the marginal space of the forest: "They came, they cut away my tallest pine, / My tall dark pines, that plumed the craggy ledge" (204-205). Furthermore, a clear demarcation distinguishes between the two sites: "Behind the valley topmost Gargarus / Stands up and takes the morning: but in front / The gorges, opening wide apart, reveal / Troas and Ilion's columned citadel" (10-13). These lines may be interpreted on two dialogic levels. First they may be interpreted as the destructive intrusion of Victorian society on the marginal imaginative experience of the Shelleyan poetic figure in the tower. On another level they may be seen as a depiction of industrial society's threat to marginal natural surroundings in general. Finally, we do not actually

witness Oenone's containment in the centre in this poem. However, her fiery end is prophetically referred to: "whereso e'er I am by night and day, All earth and air seem only burning fire" (263-264). In the posthumously published poem "The Death of Oenone" Tennyson returns once more to this myth.

The Death of Oenone

This poem written between August 1889 and July 1890, is described in the collection of poems edited by Christopher Ricks The Poems of Tennyson as a sequel to "Oenone" (1427). In this much shorter poem Tennyson invites his emblematic Romantic poetic sensibility embodied in "Oenone" to die once more. The same death journey from marginal to liminal and ending in the centre is described here. However, more space is given in this poem to the description of containment in the centre, while less space is assigned to the description of the liminal epiphanic moment as it becomes reduced to the moment of Paris's judgement without further elaboration. Another interesting innovation on the poem is its having as an introduction a dedication "To the Master of Balliol". In this manner, he attempts, as in "Morte D'Arthur"'s framing text "The Epic," to invite the Victorian audience to question their glorification of their age of progress: "Today, before you turn again / To thoughts that lift the soul of men, / Hear my cataract's / Downward thunder in hollow and glen" (13-16).

Again in this poem, Oenone begins her journey of death from a marginal domain. This domain is no longer one of growth but of death. The vine that was bulging with flowers in the Oenone poem is now "one blank" since all the vines have "withered long

ago" (4-6). All the surroundings around her seem to echo a deathly message. The branches are "naked," "dead cords" and "withered," the sky is "sunless" and referred to as "weeping" and the earth is described as "flowerless" (7-9). This description of the marginal domain as wasting away draws our attention to Tennyson's decreasing hope in the regenerative role of poetry in a society so blind to its importance. It is almost as if he no longer has patience to carry out his dialogic struggle as late in his career as this poem is written.

The epiphanic moment is then briefly described. In this brief flashback Oenone recalls Paris's nomination as judge of gods. No deep elaboration of the moment is introduced as Oenone summarizes the epiphanic moment in the lines, "Her husband in the flush of youth and dawn, / Paris, himself as beautiful as a God" (17-18). It is a "flashing," "mysterious," and "expansive" moment for the same reasons as those mentioned in the "Oenone" poem (Bidney 2). Then, after refusing to heal Paris, Oenone begins her journey to Troy.

Several phrases hint at the fact that Oenone's journey from the margins to the centre will be fatal. The animate and inanimate dwellers of the margins scream almost as in warning: "She waked a bird of prey that screamed," "She roused a snake," "A panther sprang across her path," and she hears "the shriek of some lost life among the pines" (87-90). At the centre, Oenone is reinterpreted by society; instead of being seen as the forsaken wife she is interpreted as the heartless witch who refused to heal her husband, and the shepherds at the centre blame her for this: " 'He, whom thou wouldst not heal!'" (101). At the centre, the dead Paris is revered by the shepherds and referred to as a

“shepherd-prince” (63). The fact that he was the cause of the Trojan War due to his unwise choice is brushed aside. On another level, instead of becoming the poet figure challenging the boundaries of society she traps herself within its definitions believing them and raising Paris and the materialistic lustful life he represented over her own marginal poetic existence. Hence she decides to embrace death and die with Paris. In this she has no other choice, since her whole existence is reshaped by the beliefs of the centre. The subsequent choice to throw herself into the fire may be interpreted on two levels. It may be seen as an embodiment of the impossibility of the merger of the marginal, represented by Oenone, and the centre with its materialistic standards, represented by Paris. Hence, ironically, only a destructive fire can merge them and in merging them it destroys them both. On another level with Oenone’s entrance into society she reassumes the cultural role of wife and throws herself in Greek manner in the death fire to be burnt along with the rest of his other belongings. In “The Lord of Burleigh” the same paradigm of emblematic female death can be traced though in the shape of a different form, the ballad.

The Lord of Burleigh

Though Tennyson entitles his poem “The Lord of Burleigh” after the lord who assumes the role of a landscape artist to convince a village maiden to fall in love with him, the ballad is actually about her slow death as the Lady of Burleigh. Christopher Ricks points out that this poem is based on the true story of Sarah Hoggins who married in 1791 and died in 1797 (*The Poems of Tennyson* 603). Tennyson’s poem dealing with the death

of this village maiden seems to echo the same death paradigm of margin, liminal and centre that characterizes the other dying emblematic female characters. Like *The Lady of Shalott*, Elaine and Oenone, she begins her journey of death on the margins of society in a rural village. Her life is embedded in the countryside. She is a "village maiden" who marries at a "village altar" and hopes to spend the rest of her days in a village "cottage" (8-15). She enjoys the simple rustic life idealized by Romantics like Wordsworth and pre-Romantics in the pastoral tradition such as Goldsmith. Wordsworth in his Preface to the Lyrical Ballads praises rustic life as the best object of poetry saying, "Humble and rustic life was chosen, because, in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity" (Wordsworth 386). This village girl enjoys the simple, poor and rustic life idealized by Wordsworth and is described as living within the embrace of nature: "Summer woods, about them blowing" (19). Like Oenone's Paris, and Elaine and *The Lady's Lancelot*, Lord Burleigh is an illusion idealized by the village maiden who has a dialogic significance. Burleigh can be seen as having a dual identity similar to those assigned to Lancelot, the ideal chivalric knight, and Paris the ideal pastoral shepherd.

Burleigh removes the village maiden from her happy marginal existence and introduces her into a new atmosphere at the aristocratic centre of society. Burleigh's deception of the maiden and her reaction are portrayed in such a manner that we sense here that Tennyson is really advocating the lower, marginal class over life in the aristocratic centre. This is embodied in the maiden's concentration and adoration of life in the cottage "Evermore she seems to gaze / On that cottage growing nearer, / Where they twain will spend their days" and the description of her reaction when she discovers the identity of her

husband “And her spirit changed within” (34-64). Or on a different level of interpretation a poetic marginal existence is preferred over materialistic upper class Victorian life. What is most troubling about the eradication of the village maiden and poetic figure from the countryside and her introduction into the centre of society is the deception involved in it. David Goslee comments upon Burleigh’s act of deception as he takes the maiden to his castle instead of the cottage he had promised her saying: “the apparent detour on their journey is perceived by reader and victim as the entrance of a bewildered animal into the increasingly narrow confines of a trap” (82). As an embodiment of the Wordsworthian idealization of rustic life she is killed by Burleigh’s action since she is forced to leave both her pastoral ideal life and assume the weaker role in an economically unequal relationship.

The epiphanic moment takes place distinctly when she discovers that Burleigh has lured her with an illusory artistic identity which she preferred to his aristocratic identity: “Oh, that he were once more that landscape-painter” (82-83). From the moment she experiences this epiphanic moment, life is slowly drained from her as she becomes a quaint collectible object within the lord’s house. This moment is also described in the same imagery often used by Tennyson to refer to epiphanic moments: “All at once the colour flushes / Her sweet face from brow to chin: / As it were with shame she blushes, / And her spirit changed within” (61-64). Reference to a change in her spirit in these lines indicates to what degree Burleigh’s deception has harmed her, reaching her very spirit. Characteristics which distinguish Tennyson’s epiphany can be traced here. The flushing of the maiden’s face represents the “flashing” quality of Tennyson’s epiphany referred to by Bidney. Furthermore, this moment is “expansive” which according to Bidney’s definition “implies

that the moment in question seems to mean far more than its limitedness in time and space might warrant" (Bidney 2). In this sense we can claim that this moment means far more than its limitedness in time since it embodies the maiden's state of broken spirit which haunts her for the rest of her life so that she is described, "But a trouble weighed upon her, / And perplexed her, night and morn" (77-78). In addition to this, there is a degree of mystery related to the moment since it is never completely clarified what it is exactly which dims her spirit. Hence, whether it is the humiliation of an unequal class relationship ("the burthen of an honour / Unto which she was not born") or the illusory artistic identity which Burleigh assumed to marry her ("Oh that he / Were once more that landscape-painter") or the tedious existence of a Victorian aristocratic lady, she is described as forcing herself to uphold this image ("Shaped her heart with women's meekness / To all duties of her rank") (71-83). These three possible reasons for the village maiden's slow death are related in that she has no choice in them. This distinguishes this village maid from the other emblematic females because Lord Burleigh's treatment of her is more along the terms of murder rather than a chosen act of suicide as is the case with the other female heroines. Her life at the centre is described as a burden.

In the aristocratic centre the village maiden leads a life of eternal withering. In fact she begins to die slowly from the moment she discovers Lord Burleigh's true identity. Her ensuing death-in-life state is reminiscent of Tithonus who achieves the ultimate human wish of eternal life but does not find happiness. Similarly, the village maiden attains wealth and rank but is still unhappy. She slowly withers at his side: "Faint she grew, and even fainter," "So she drooped and drooped before him," "fading slowly from his side" (81-86).

From these phrases describing her state we discern some characteristics of life at the centre. It is a burdensome life detrimental to the spiritual growth of the female. Moreover, it is a life where deception is not a sin, as is clarified through Burleigh's proud admittance of his deception, "Proudly turns he round and kindly, / All of this is mine and thine" (55-56). What is most intriguing about the cottage maiden's death-in-life state in the centre is Burleigh's apparent ignorance of what he has done to her. Similar to a Lancelot who only interprets an Elaine or a Lady of Shalott on a superficial level as a "lovely face". Burleigh is at the end most concerned with the details of his wife's burial with regard to giving her the spectacle burial assigned to women. Hence he chooses to have her buried in her wedding dress: "In the dress that she was wed in, / That her spirit might have rest" (99-100). This can be seen as an unconscious admission on his part of the fatal role he played in her life. This is due to the fact that the dress may be seen as an emblem of the critical moment that transformed her peaceful existence.

All in all, what distinguishes "The Lord of Burleigh" from other female legendary death poems is the fact that it adds the factor of class to the symbolic possibilities of the death paradigm. Hence, the female mask donned by Tennyson is symbolic of his Romantic poetic sensibility. Though legendary deaths of men are also symbolic and are not self-referent, they always symbolize beliefs that Tennyson wishes to revive and celebrate such as chivalry and epic-size heroism. Even when they embody a Romantic poetic stance, he is still willing to relate to them. However, in the case of Tennyson's legendary and folkloric women their deaths are only made symbolic of an effeminate Romantic poetic sensibility he is willing to discard more easily because he sets it off as other. In this we can trace the

inner struggle within Tennyson between acceptance of a Romantic poetic sensibility and disclaiming it through the final deaths he assigns to legendary or folkloric women. He thus never hints at their possible return as he does with the legendary culture heroes. This would explain why he uses legendary women as emblems of his Romantic poetic sensibility. They symbolize what he wants to set aside as other.

We could trace this death paradigm in other poems by Tennyson about isolated female characters, such as “Mariana” and “Mariana in the South”. Once more these heroines are portrayed on the margins of society wishing to die. They are poetic figures because they are adapted from Shakespeare’s Measure for Measure and Keats’s “Isabella”. In “Mariana in the South,” she is described as singing a carol. Both Marianas represent a Romantic poetic sensibility pining away at the margins. These personas are provoked to leave their poetic existence and yet are still not satisfied. By portraying such a variety of emblematic female poetic personas we realize to what degree Tennyson is dialogic. He introduces us to the two possible interactions of Romantic sensibility with life and delineates them as being both unsatisfactory. Life on the margins for the Romantic poetic sensibility is unbearable; entrance into society is detrimental.

Conclusion

All in all, through the course of my study of Tennyson, my perspective upon him has evolved to a great extent. I first chose him basically as an exemplar of the Victorian age. I was intrigued by the recurring theme of death in his poetry, especially in In Memoriam, and hoped to compare it to Milton's "Lycidas" and Shelley's "Adonais". However, I soon realized how impossible such an attempt would be for a Master's thesis, and of the three poets I originally aimed to study, chose Tennyson. In Memoriam was my starting point with its theme of death and its clash between faith and science. In my reading and re-reading of it, death slowly began to emerge as a powerful symbolic entity, which I began to search for in the remainder of his poetry. Gradually I realized that Tennyson was not only intrigued by death in In Memoriam but also obsessed with it throughout his career. Moreover, the Victorians were known for their obsessive and ritualistic treatment of death. After all, Queen Victoria herself mourned the death of her husband quite elaborately for 40 years:

Dressing in black every day and keeping their home exactly as it was the day he died [...]. Each morning, servants set out Albert's clothes, brought hot water for his shaving cup, scoured his chamber pot and changed bed linens. The glass from which he took his last dose of medicine stayed by his bedside for nearly four decades. A bust or painting of the prince was also included in nearly every photographic portrait of the royal family.
(Christ, 1-2)

Hence I began to see Tennyson's writing about the subject of death as a fetishistic ritual similar to Victoria's mourning, but ultimately realized that the significance of this theme ran far deeper than this preliminary superficial interpretation. Death in Tennyson's poetry is intrinsically related to a variety of issues such as liminality, epiphany, cultural critique, poetry and literature, dialogism and gender.

In In Memoriam I began to notice a pattern in Tennyson's use of images of epiphany. In all of these images liminality was central, along with death and poetry. Furthermore, I was able to discern an escalating development in the epiphanic lyrics of this poem that reaches its climax in Lyric 95. It is almost as if Tennyson throughout In Memoriam is struggling up a flight of stairs to reach the epiphanic moment, and stumbles back falling down, until he reaches Lyric 95. Moreover, through the study of the development of epiphany I began to distinguish a second voice in the poetry of Tennyson, a voice different from the Victorian Utilitarian laureate who writes poems on public occasions to satisfy the taste of a Victorian audience who, in the words of the Victorian critic Alfred Austin, "having plenty of money, and having procured with it an immense amount of desirable things [...] is desirous of having great art likewise, which it had always heard is a good thing, and which, moreover, it fancies that it has got" (Bristow, 120). Though I disagree with Austin's views on Tennyson, and my whole thesis could be considered an answer to his claims, I find his description of the Utilitarian view of art in general and poetry in particular to be quite avant gard, especially in the context of his being a member of the Victorian age. The second voice that can be traced in Tennyson's poetry is the voice of Romanticism. What complicates the existence of this

second voice is basically two issues. First of all, this voice is not univocal by any means but rather dual toned, since at different points and throughout Tennyson's writing we can discern the voices of Shelley and Keats. Second, in spite of the fact that Tennyson is sometimes considered a late Romantic due to the existence of this voice, it does not really overcome him completely but rather is traceable in his writing as a discourse in dialogic relation with the dominant Utilitarian discourse of the time. Though at moments in In Memoriam, especially in Lyric 95, the Romantic discourse seems to overwhelm him he always manages to end on a note of doubt, doubting the epiphanic experience itself and its significance and inviting logical scientific modern reasoning to lead him. However, at other times, by raising the importance of this moment, we can deduce an attempt by him at cultural critique. I did not find gender to an issue in In Memoriam because the dying figure Hallam is more of a floating signifier. Sometimes he is referred to as God, sometimes as a beloved and sometimes as himself. However, though multivalent constructions of masculinity and femininity are dealt with, I felt they did not hold a central space due to the changeable significance of Hallam, symbolically bringing together both genders as well as the metaphysical. However, in poems that specifically deal with women and men's deaths, gender, along with all the previously discussed issues, enters the discussion.

In chapter 2 I chose to deal with male death in the form of culture heroes or male figures, which are symbolic of the ideals and beliefs held by much of Victorian culture. Hence, Arthur, Ulysses, Tiresias and Tithonus signify differing ideals of the Victorian age. However, though Victorians read these figures as representatives of their age of

progress, Tennyson delineates them in a manner that allows this interpretation and, dialogically, at the same time, invites another subversive interpretation. A question here arises that I would like to deal with. Why would Tennyson, a laureate of his age, be dissatisfied with any of its aspects? Tennyson himself answers this question, expressing his possible queasiness with his age in the 1833 poem, "You ask me why though ill at ease" (489). Tennyson's dialogic spirit is embodied here as he praises and condemns English politics in the very same instant. Though in the beginning lines of this poem he praises "The land, where girt with friends or foes / A man may speak the thing he will," he fears that "banded unions persecute / Opinion, and induce a time / When single thought is civil crime"(490). It is this second subversive interpretation that interests me since it is related to the symbolic implications of the theme of death. This is why I believe these heroes can also be seen as victims of their societies. By tracing the theme of death in "Morte D'Arthur," "Tiresias," "Ulysses" and "Tithonus" a certain paradigm of death starts to appear which is related to cultural critique as well as social, political and poetic issues. These heroes mostly begin their journey of death at the centre of society. In the cases of Arthur, Tiresias and Ulysses it is amidst a battle, within society or at the head of a kingdom. They stand dissatisfied with the state of things and wish to escape to the marginal. However, before they do so an epiphanic moment takes place which liberates and encourages them to follow their ideal dream society, providing a glimpse of what they could have and propelling them into the future. They do not die before our eyes, avoiding death and burial rituals and being left in suspension so that we are left to believe they will return some day. Interestingly, though, in "Tithonus" this paradigm changes

since the cultural hero here begins at the margins of society and experiences epiphanic moments which are more along the lines of flashbacks of a past mortal life. His main aim is hence to return to the centre, unlike the other dying culture heroes and hence this pattern resembles the death paradigm followed by the female figures. He embodies a model of masculinity different from that of the other figures. He represents complete immersion in the feminine world, while the others represent an immersion in the “just war” masculine sphere. Even their marginal dream is related to that masculine sphere. What Tennyson seems to be arguing is that a person needs to travel back and forth between the masculine and feminine worlds, not immerse oneself completely in one particular world and the ideals upheld by it. In my choice of male death poems I chose to include only poems that significantly portray the paradigm, though I believe we can trace it or different versions of it in most of Tennyson’s poems about male death. I also chose to set aside poems like “Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington” that seem rather to be poems written as part of Tennyson’s role as Laureate. The inverted paradigm traced in Tithonus is further dealt with in chapter 3 about female death.

In chapter 3 we actually really have no dying women because the dying women for Tennyson (in the poems in this study) are symbolic cultural signs. They embody a Romantic poetic peripheralized sensibility that is accused of being feminine by utilitarian critics of Tennyson’s time. Moreover, this Romantic poetic sensibility is not univocal but rather two-voiced, as is always the case with Tennyson. This poetic sensibility symbolizes for Tennyson both the angel of inspiration and the witch of destruction. Both faces appear in Tennyson’s portrayal of woman, as sign of poetic sensibility. This is why,

in “The Lady of Shalott,” “Elaine,” “Oenone,” “The Death of Oenone” and “The Lord of Burleigh” we can trace another death paradigm than that found in most of the male death poems. These legendary or folkloric dying women start at the margins. Their epiphany and death are not liberating but, rather, doomful in the sense that it leads to their engulfment by a society that is determined to reinterpret them according to its own codes and overcome the threat to conformity, which they represent. In choosing dying women to be an embodiment of a Romantic poetic sensibility, Tennyson, I believe, is trying to once and for all overcome the Romantic/Utilitarian struggle within him by exorcising himself of this Romanticism and burying it in the grave. However, being who he is, a representative of dialogic dualisms, he does not completely succeed as we recognize when we look at the remainder of his death poetry regarding dying legendary men. Though he attempts with his women characters to extract this feminine side of his dual faced poetic sensibility from within him, he does not succeed due to his divided attitude towards this feminine poetic sensibility itself.

His choice here to scapegoat Romantic poetic sensibility, which is what his dying women characters mainly represent in the above poems, is quite indicative. For him to overcome the struggle within him he feels he needs to make it “other” and what better way to do so than portraying it as a woman. This woman he can allow to die and be buried unlike the cultural heroes who in addition to representing poetic sensibility have social and cultural roles to uphold as rulers and seers. Though this does not say much about his attitude towards femininity, it says a great deal about the degree of struggle within him.

All in all, through my study of Tennyson I feel I have been studying an inner struggle, which ends in ultimate undecidability on the part of Tennyson. As I followed Tennyson up and down the stairs of Victorian poetry, I found that he is not the conformist or typical Victorian writer I expected him to be, but rather a rebel also trying to assume the conformist role of laureate. He is a human being attempting to come to terms with opposing and clashing ideals, which if seen in this light makes him more understandable for most of us living in a world of increasing diversity. Dualisms were always a great point of interest for Tennyson as early as the 1830 short poem "Dualisms" where he expresses his interest in dialogic expression: "Like, unlike, they roam together/ Under a summervault of golden weather; / Like, unlike, they sing together / Side by side,"(254). In this rather simple poem he seems to compare the harmonious coupling in nature in the form of birds and bees in contrast to the world of humans where there is always: "Like, unlike" in dialogism with one another.

Moreover, I have learned how death can have multifarious implications, all relating it to life. Truly I now believe that to study and understand a culture, death can open new venues of interpretation. My original project to compare Tennyson's notions of death to Milton's and Shelley's invites itself once more, with the possible addition of poets from other cultures and post-modern poets like e.e. cummings in order to further explore the symbolic possibilities of death. T.S. Eliot in 1942 in *Four Quartets* commented on death and how it opens new venues of expression, saying, "And what the dead had no speech for, when living, They can tell you, being dead: the communication Of the dead is tongued with fire beyond the language of the living" (Kemp, 53).

I have also learned how generative the study of liminal epiphanic experience can be in discovering recurrent patterns in a writer's works. Through concentration on epiphany I was able to discern the death paradigm in Tennyson's poems and the shift in the paradigm with regards to gender. Also, due to the fact that Tennyson assumes two contradictory roles, that of Romantic and Victorian, a study of epiphany helps to clarify the relation between these roles and the extent of Tennyson's struggle with them. Moreover, using Bakhtin's theory of dialogism was also particularly helpful in explaining these contradictory discourses that Tennyson struggled with.

Finally, Tennyson's life long obsession with death can be best summed up in his wish that "Crossing the Bar" be printed in all editions of his poetry. In this short epitaph-like poem Tennyson anticipates his own journey of death. Again we begin at the centre at a dock where the ship of death is about to embark. The epiphanic moment of brightness is described in the reference to "Twilight and evening bell" (1458). Then his doubtful hope of achieving eternal life in the margins is expressed in the last lines of the poem: "I hope to see my Pilot face to face / When I have crost the bar"(1459). Once more Tennyson leaves us with his insistence on lack of finality. This is clear in his in the uncertainty of "I hope" at the end of this poem.

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