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THE VAST SUSPENSE: PATTERNS OF ANTI-CLOSURE IN TENNYSON

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Written in late summer 1888—apparently soon after his recovery from a severe illness—Tennyson's "Far-Far-Away" addresses perennial concerns of much of his poetry. The "passion of the past," the hope of renewal in the dim light of dawn, a terrestrial landscape that fades to a celestial one, even the characteristic forward-backward movement of the verse—all are here in a poem that evokes those central mysteries of existence which seem always to have inspired his best poetry:

> A whisper from his dawn of life? a breath
> From some fair dawn beyond the doors of death
> Far-far-away?
>
> Far, far, how far? from o'er the gates of Birth,
> The faint horizons, all the bounds of earth,
> Far-far-away?[1]

That evocation of the future as "some fair dawn beyond the doors of death" is a characteristic of the poetry, early and—given the evidence of this lyric—quite late. William Fredeman, calling this characteristic of the verse, Tennyson's "penultimate moment," has noted its prominence in the dramatic monologues and lyrics, and Christopher Ricks, moving somewhat beyond Fredeman, has observed the penultimate note throughout the canon. In fact, what Ricks has called Tennyson's "art of the penultimate," his ability to set up "a tension between [the poem's] existing moment and its unmentioned outcome"[2] is as evident here, in 1888, as in poems as early as "Armageddon" (1824?) and "Mariana" (1830). Not only is the penultimate moment expressed in such relatively brief narrative poems as "Armageddon"—where, for example, the poem's ostensible subject is avoided and the poem ends "on the vast/ Suspense of some grand issue" (R 74, 33-4)—but it may be found in the final stnzas of works as lengthy as the *Idylls of the King* and *In Memoriam*. The endings of these poems, in other words, really are not endings in themselves because they so often look forward to a future ending rather than enacting or depicting one.

While perhaps acknowledging Tennyson's penultimate moment as an "art," Barbara Herrnstein Smith might prefer to call this poet's curiously unclosed endings "weak" or even "false." In what remains to

this day the only full-length study of poetic closure, Smith contends that adequate, successful closure in a poem "gratifies" by releasing whatever tensions have been stimulated by the poem itself. Putting the case another way, she argues that "an experience is gratifying to the extent that those expectations that are aroused are also fulfilled."[3] As appropriate as this argument is within the boundaries of Smith's *Poetic Closure*, it is inadequate in discussions of the anti-closure tendency of much nineteenth-century verse—Browning's and Tennyson's in particular.[4] Tennyson rarely "gratifies" at all in Smith's sense of the word but writes instead—consistently, over a span of more than sixty years—a kind of poetry which does not close on itself, does not yield what Smith calls a "sense of stable conclusiveness, finality, or 'clinch'" but, rather, stimulates without gratifying and anticipates without delivering. Even so—and Smith herself accepts the point—"weak" closure often causes the conclusion of the poem to bear an unusually heavy influence on a reader's interpretation of the whole.[5] In this essay I shall argue, in readings of five representative poems which resist Smith's traditional sense of closure, that Tennyson's use of anti-closure has crucial consequences on interpretation. Further, I will suggest that Tennyson's anti-closure conforms to a relatively consistent pattern within the canon as the unclosed poems share not only characteristics of style but also demonstrate Tennyson's sense of a non-ending in art as well as in life.

"Mariana" first appeared in *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical* (1830), and represents an early example of Tennysonian antic-closure in narrative verse. While other poems in that volume resist enacting the endings they seem to promise—"The Kraken," for example, and "A spirit haunts the year's last hours"—"Mariana" alone stops short of a conclusion not only well known but far happier than the one the poem appears to embrace. The Kraken's end is obscured by its use of the future tense, the "spirit" of the year's last hours is felt more than seen; so the precise identities and ultimate destinies of the sea creature and the spirit are unrevealed. But "Mariana" has an ending, not in the poem itself but in the comedy which provides that epigraph on the moated grange, Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*. Why Tennyson should allude within an unresolved poem to comic resolution in Shakespeare is only one question raised by the anti-closure pattern taken by "Mariana."

From beginning to end, "Mariana" surprises us and reverses our expectations. The allusion in the epigraph to a play in which Mariana is married to Angelo, is obviously undercut by the poem; less obviously, the apparent "quotation" from Shakespeare actually does not appear in his play. The perfectly regular iambic tetrameter lines are broken at the ninth line of each stanza, and they are further attenuated

by the feminine rhymes of the refrain and by its numbing repetitions. The expected progression from "day" to "night" never occurs as we move from one refrain to the next; the progression from "night" to "day" occurs only once (stanzas 2 and 3) and may very well be forgotten as "life" and "night" become nearly synonymous, appearing five times in the poem's seven refrains. So our expectation of natural progression to a close is impeded at every turn. Time is suspended as the poem seems to rotate in space on its monotonous refrains; and those internal repetitions within the refrains (she said, she said; aweary, aweary) give only the illusion of motion through rhythm and repetition because Mariana herself is going nowhere. It is true that despite the many repetitions, the refrains are not identical,[6] and in what appears to be the speaker's most significant cry, Mariana moves from wish to plea. The change occurs in the final line: not, "I would that I were dead!" but for this one and last time, "Oh God, that I were dead!" The change in tone is so slight as to be virtually insignificant, and even that apparent introduction of the spondee in the final line may be more wished for by the reader than sanctioned by an iambic trimeter line that never changes in seven stanzas.

At the end of the poem Mariana looks out across the moated grange, the glooming flats, the rounding gray to, presumably, a man who does not come and a God who does not answer. The poem obviously does not attain resolution, but it does provide a sign of resolution in its epigraph. So we return to the interpretive problem raised by this version of anti-closure: why allude in an unclosed poem to the ultimately "closed" relationship of Mariana and Angelo, a relationship resolved in marriage? Ricks finds the allusion "profoundly equivocal," optimistic and pessimistic simultaneously. "Mariana" is optimistic as it points to the happy resolution in Shakespeare, pessimistic in its reminder that *Measure for Measure* "is patently not the real vulnerable world, whereas the world of 'Mariana' may be."[7] This ironic discrepancy set up by the juxtaposition of Shakespearean and Tennysonian Marianas is especially pointed in James Kincaid's reading of the poem. Calling the poem "a cosmic statement of irony," Kincaid sees no point in looking to *Measure for Measure* for a resolution withheld in the poem; in "Mariana" the "whole point [is] that Mariana's love is senselessly denied, that her fruition is cut off without reason."[8] These ironic readings exert a powerful attraction, but they overlook the pattern frequently taken by Tennysonian anti-closure. I am anticipating some readings of later poems, but I believe that even here in the early "Mariana" the poem does not give us a close because the close so hopelessly desired is death. Even here, a silent God will not answer a plea from one who wants only to die.

Before moving to a discussion of the anti-closural patterns in the dramatic monologues, I wish to consider two more narrative poems from the early years. Both "The Lady of Shalott" and "The Lotos-Eaters" appeared in *Poems* (1833) and both reappeared, considerably revised in *Poems* (1842). In his revisions Tennyson paid particular attention to the endings of both poems, and comparison of the final stanzas of the 1833 "Shalott" and "Lotos-Eaters" with their 1842 versions illustrates Tennyson's continuing interest in the unclosed ending. The second "Shalott," for example, is clearly more unclosed than the first, and the second "Lotos-Eaters," while less allusive and open-ended than "Shalott," shows especially in its final lines how a sophisticated sense of anti-closure betrays the hollowness of the mariners' Choric Song.

"The Lady of Shalott" embraces antithetical subjects: island and city; "four gray walls, and four gray towers," and "the lighted palace;" and, finally, the "fairy Lady of Shalott" and "bold Sir Lancelot." The antitheses point to the lady's terrible choice but for our purposes they would seem to point to a strong sense of closure, rather than anti-closure. For despite the woman's containment by walls, island, and river, she braves the curse to look down to Camelot and then actually moves Shalott to Camelot. The choice is fatal to the lady, but in bringing death to the poem's close it would seem that the poem precludes an unclosed reading. And not only do all those Camelot-Shalott rhymes—seventeen pairs of them by the final stanza—point to a strong sense of closure as Shalott meets Camelot and the lady meets her death, but even the lady's single speech is contained by an unvarying and regular metrical line. Her last word may be unaccented, but it is answered by the final stress of the iambic tetrameter line:

> Out flew the web and floated wide;
> The mirror cracked from side to side;
> 'The curse is come upon me,' cried
>   The Lady of Shalott.
>   (R 359, 114-17)

Dwight Culler observes that Lancelot intrudes into the lady's refrain "as he had into her world"[9] and indeed he does in both versions of the poem; but, in the important revision of 1842, she does actually meet the bold Sir Lancelot. Tennyson himself commented on his revised version and paid special attention to his reduction in 1842 of hissing sibilants—he claimed he had succeeded in kicking "the geese out of the boat."[10] More important than the absence of geese is the presence of that final stanza, for not only does it replace an 1832

condescending stanza on the "wellfed wits at Camelot," but it introduces Lancelot's one and only comment on the lady:

> Who is this? and what is here?
> And in the lighted palace near
> Died the sound of royal cheer;
> And they crossed themselves for fear,
> All the knights at Camelot:
> But Lancelot mused a little space;
> He said, 'She has a lovely face;
> God in his mercy lend her grace,
> The Lady of Shalott.'
> (R 361, 163-71)

Lancelot's comment would seem equivocal. James Kissane, for example, sees "smug insensitivity" in Lancelot's words,[11] but Edgar Shannon reminds us that the second line, "God in his mercy lend her grace" would recall, at least to Anglican ears, the burial service in *The Book of Common Prayer* "with its supplications for both mercy and grace."[12] Shannon's reading complements Ricks's, but Ricks, once again, points to the unclosed reading invited by the 1842 revision: "...in those lines we sense—off the end of the poem again—another destructive love which awaits its catastrophe."[13] Such a reading is wholly appropriate, for Tennyson is alrready alluding through Lancelot to other poems within the canon—both written and unwritten. In Lancelot's words "lovely face" Tennyson echoes a line from the 1830 poem "Sir Lancelot and Queen Guinevere"; the compliment first given Guinevere that is now given the Lady of Shalott helps us see the relevance of Ricks's comment on a "destructive love" awaiting its catastrophe. But the poem also looks forward to the treatment of the Shalott-Lancelot story in "Lancelot and Elaine" in 1859 of the *Idylls*. The point of the unclosed ending is not a cruel irony: the lady has not died only to be commemorated with a flippant aside. For the Lady of Shalott dies within a context far larger than that perceived by the isolated artist—the context includes a poem written twelve years earlier and one to be written seventeen years later. The artistic context is not only larger than the self but it permits re-creation: the Lady of Shalott becomes Elaine, the Lily Maid of Astolat. The ultimate paradox of the poem is that the lady's death brings life to Tennyson's artistic Camelot.[14]

As is the case with "The Lady of Shalott," the most significant revisions in the 1842 version of "The Lotos-Eaters" occur at the end of the poem. Twenty-three lines composed in 1842 replace the earlier conclusion, but their effect on an unclosed reading of the poem is not

nearly so strong as the second Lady of Shalott on the first. As consistent as his interest in anti-closure seems to be, it is also true that "The Lady of Shalott" and "The Lotos-Eaters" exist in different contexts and would appear to attract Tennyson in different ways. The fact that the lady is an isolated artist whose fate seems enigmatic would seem part of an almost personal myth of the artist—a myth resolved positively, at least in my reading of the poem, by the 1842 version. But "The Lotos-Eaters" has a classical context and an ending, unmentioned as usual in the poem, in the *Odyssey*. Odysseus, that is, provides a cryptic end of the story: "These men, therefore, I brought back perforce to the ships, weeping." Tennyson will have none of this and leaves his mariners in both versions of the poem vowing neither to "return" (1832) nor to "wander" (1842) "more." The 1842 version is, as we shall see, as unclosed as the first version in denying Odysseus his swift resolution, but by oddly recalling words from another important and unclosed poem of 1842 the poem subtly exposes the fatal delusion of the mariners' song.

"The Lotos-Eaters" provides us with a structure we have not seen in previous unclosed poems. The regular stanzas of "Mariana" and "The Lady of Shalott" give way to the five Spenserians of the opening frame and to the long and metrically varied Choric Song of the mariners. So formal a metrical environment would seem to preclude anti-closure, but it is part of the poem's elaborate irony that things are not what they seem, and the Spenserian stanza itself is used as a formal contrivance designed to mask a hollow argument for selfish irresponsibility. As early as the first stanza the whole poem actually pivots away from Odysseus' command—"Courage!"—and settles into elaborate, stylized description:

> In the afternoon they came unto a land
> In which it seemed always afternoon.
> All round the coast the languid air did swoon,
> Breathing like one that hath a weary dream.
> Full-faced above the valley stood the moon;
> And like a downward smoke, the slender stream
> Along the cliff to fall and pause and fall did seem.
> (R 430, 309)

That final Alexandrine illustrates a part of the poem's method. The archaic verb form "did seem" fulfills the obligation of the final line to expand its length by a foot but it also focuses on semblance as a problem to confront. To put the point another way, the line provides an illusion of what the mariners take to be reality and gives us, simultaneously, an illusion of finality. For what would seem more

formal, more "closed" than the Spenserian stanza? Not Tennyson's version, for his Spenserians are deliberately padded with their archaic verbs as they give the illusion of formality, order, and finality—an illusion eventually broken by the intrusion of the Choric Song.

The Spenserians give way to the Choric Song which literally carries the poem away from the opening formal cadences. In one way, the poem's essentially unclosed nature is almost graphically illustrated by the way in which it remains "unframed"—Spenserians introduce a Choric Song that never returns to the opening Spenserians for a traditional sense of closure. In another way, we know from the allusion to the *Odyssey* that the Choric Song does not give us the final word on the mariners. But even more interesting than the formal break of Spenserians to free verse and the Homeric allusion—both of which point to the unclosed nature of the poem—is the revised 1842 version with its ability to allude to another poem within the canon first published in 1830.

The most obvious difference between the two endings is the announcement by the mariners in 1842 that they will "Live and lie reclined/ On the hills like Gods together, careless of mankind." This hubristic oath was not a part even of the tone of the 1832 version, and its inclusion in 1842 would seem to indicate Tennyson's more confident rejection of the desire to escape a world from which "All things are taken from us, and become/ Portions and parcels of the dreadful past." The argument may be irresponsible, but in Tennyson's second version he wishes us to see that it is confused—fatally so. The original version ends as follows:

> Surely, surely slumber is more sweet than toil, the shore
> Than labour in the ocean, and rowing with the oar.
> Oh! islanders of Ithaca, we will return no more.
> (R 436, [38-40])

But in 1842, these lines conclude the poem:

> Surely, surely slumber is more sweet than toil, the shore
> Than labour in the deep mid-ocean, wind and wave and oar;
> Oh rest ye, brother mariners, we will not wander more.
> (R 437, 171-73)

The important difference between the conclusions, as I see it, is the insertion of "rest" in the last line of the 1842 poem. The word recalls, uneasily, the rest of the dead, and in fact the word appears almost apposite to death in the Choric Song itself at l. 96:

> All things have rest, and ripen toward the grave
> In silence; ripen, fall and cease:
> Give us long rest or death, dark death, or dreamful ease.
> (R 433, 96-98)

And "rest" has been associated with death in the 1832 elegy on Edward Spedding, "To J. S." Significantly, the word appears near the close of the poem: "Sleep full of rest from head to feet;/ Lie still, dry dust, secure of change" (R 466, 75-6). The allusively unclosed ending of "The Lotos-Eaters" reminds us again not only that there is "confusion worse than death" but that what the mariners most yearn for *is* death. We have not heard so eloquent a plea for death since Mariana's mournful refrains—and this plea, like hers, will go unanswered.

If patterns of anti-closure occur with some frequency in the narrative poems, their roles and their effect on interpretation are even more prominent in the dramatic monologues. In his essay on the nine major dramatic monologues Tennyson wrote between 1833 and 1885, William Fredeman notes their common treatment of the penultimate: the speakers share the twilight of old age and face a future undisclosed within the poems themselves. He notes as well that in contrast to Browning's speakers who, "even when they are victims of their own delusions" can move backward and forward, Tennyson's speakers "are cornered; they can only, as Ulysses puts it so well,...'pause' and 'make an end'."[15]

The pause which makes up the seventy blank verse lines of "Ulysses" is an especially provocative example of Tennyson's anti-closure, for once again a poem anticipates a conclusion withheld. In this case the conclusion is in Dante's *Inferno* where only a few lines after Ulysses' speech to his mariners, his ship, his crew, and Ulysses himself sink beneath the waves. Despite Tennyson's gloss in the *Memoir* that the poem "gives the feeling about the need of going forward and braving the struggle of life perhaps more simply than anything in 'In Memoriam',"[16] we should be troubled by a poem which clearly does not move forward—and even more troubled when we realize that the voyage, off the edge of the poem, is a final one. It may be especially helpful, then, to take another look at "Ulysses" within the context of Tennyson's unclosed poems.

The peculiar silence in "Ulysses" is a characteristic of other unclosed poems we have examined and is present even in "The Lotos-Eaters" where the mariners sing in one voice to an unnamed, unseen audience. But of more significance than the peculiarly isolating silence is the heavy weight of the past in his monologue. In this subject, too, the poem shares similarities with other unclosed poems. But Ulysses' burden of the past is far heavier than anything we have seen so far

because he, unlike all the others, is an old man. He knows the length of years traveled between past experiences and the present moment and is almost brutally honest in acknowledging how short is the distance between his present self and his future death:

> for my purpose holds
> To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
> Of all the western stars, until I die.
> (R 565, 59-61)

However close the final voyage may be, however much the use of the conditional mood attenuates the speaker's use of the future tense, Ulysses does not simply yearn for death. His problem is that in one sensibility he contains both past and present and knows, as Tennyson knew himself, the paradoxically close but distant relation of past to present.

That much should be clear from some of the most famous lines in the poem, the ones celebrated by Matthew Arnold as taking up by themselves "nearly as much time as a whole book of the *Iliad*":[17]

> I am a part of all that I have met;
> Yet all experience is an arch wherethrough
> Gleams that untravelled world, whose margin fades
> For ever and for ever when I move.
> (R 563, 18-21)

Ulysses' past is summed up in his present but the lines on the future (the "untravelled world") are richly suggestive. While it may certainly be true that in these lines we see the heroic or even existential Ulysses ready to assert himself or define himself through yet another great adventure, it is significant that the man does nothing of the kind and remains, as Goldwin Smith noted as early as 1855,[18] standing on the shore. Within the context of the unclosed poems we may be able to understand what appears to be a contradiction in lines on movement spoken by a speaker in suspension. Ulysses seeks not simply a new adventure but a place where the margin—a boundary, something that contains—fades for ever and for ever. Also, within a few lines, Ulysses speaks once more of moving outside boundaries,

> To follow knowledge like a sinking star,
> Beyond the utmost bounds of human thought.
> (R 564, 31-2)

The lines anticipate movement beyond not only this present time and space but movement beyond death. It may be, says Ulysses, the gulfs

will wash us down: "It may be that we shall touch the Happy Isles/ And see the great Achilles, whom we knew" (R 565, 62-3). Achilles was on those ringing plains in windy Troy so many years ago and it is hard to imagine in a poem which alludes at the end to the great warrior, that Ulysses fails to associate his past with the dead Achilles; it is hard to imagine, too, that Tennyson fails to associate Achilles with Hallam—especially when we learn that l. 66 quotes directly from a poem written in 1829 by Hallam himself.[19] To bring past, present, and even future together—and to see the great Achilles, whom we knew—is to escape indeed the bounds of human thought. It is certainly this experience which Ulysses so poignantly hopes for. Years before Tennyson's "Ancient Sage" will counsel that in certain moments "the late and early [are] but one" (R 1355, 222), Ulysses seeks to pass beyond—in the words of yet another late poem, "Far-Far-Away"—"the bounds of earth." So deep, finally, is this yearning for a passage beyond this world, that the weight of the poem comes to rest not on what appears to be the strong sense of closure announced in four infinitives—"To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield,"[20]—but on a single word that admits of movement and experience to come: yield.

"Tithon"—later revised as "Tithonus"—was written almost simultaneously with "Ulysses" in 1833 and in this dramatic monologue Tennyson turns once more to the unclosed ending. Not only is the ending withheld, but other elements we associate with Tennyson's anti-closural patterns recur. Tithonus is at least as solitary a figure as Ulysses; for not only is it far from clear that Aurora hears his plea, "take back thy gift," but Tithonus actually refers to his home at the edge of the world as "the ever-silent spaces of the East" (R 114, 9).[21] The burden of the past is heavy upon him, too, though it is possible that no one in the unclosed poem carries so heavy a burden; for Tithonus, alone among the monologuists, faces that past directly—day after day—in the beauty and eternal youth of Aurora:

> thy strong Hours indignant worked their wills,
> And beat me down and marred and wasted me,
> And though they could not end me, left me maimed
> To dwell in presence of immortal youth,
> Immortal age beside immortal youth,
> And all I was, in ashes.
>
> (R 1115, 18-23)

The repetitions in these lines imitate the burden of immortality by repeating the word "immortal" three times within six words and by rhyming "youth" with itself. These lines also point to a cruel disparity: immortal youth and immortal age. We saw earlier in "The

Lady of Shalott" how the oppositions of Shalott and Camelot and, finally, Lancelot impeded movement and suppressed clear resolution, so we should not be surprised to see opposites play a role in this unclosed poem. "Tithonus," however, resembles "Mariana" even more than "The Lady of Shalott" in its direct plea for death and in its stasis.

The poem's stasis is most pronounced in its opening:

> The woods decay, the woods decay and fall,
> The vapours weep their burthen to the ground,
> Man comes and tills the field and lies beneath,
> And after many a summer dies the swan.
> (R 1114, 1-4)

In the first version of the poem l. 4 read, "And after many summers dies the rose" (R 566, 4), and it is interesting to consider that in replacing the rose with the swan Tennyson alludes not only to his poem "The Dying Swan," written in 1830, but also to the imagery surrounding the dying Lady of Shalott (R 360, 136-53). The poem's opening cadences prepare us for its end as we find Tithonus yearning to "lie beneath" the ground:

> Release me, and restore me to the ground;
> Thou seest all things, thou wilt see my grave:
> Thou wilt renew thy beauty morn by morn;
> I earth in earth forget these empty courts,
> And thee returning on thy silver wheels.
> (R 1118, 72-6)

Even in its conclusion, the poem has not moved beyond its opening as the imagery of the grave recalls l. 3. And in resting on the concluding word "wheels" the poem suggests that the movement of Aurora and the dawn will come round again. Tomorrow will be much the same as today, and Tithonus will remain powerless to affect change. Mariana, confronted with a similar situation, yearns for death as resolution. So, too, Tithonus. But once more we see in an unclosed poem that yearns for death that such pleas go unanswered.

It should be clear that the unclosed ending is a characteristic of Tennyson's lengthy and productive career. I have referred to the characteristic in several poems and have concentrated on readings of five important unclosed poems in order to illustrate what I have called "patterns of anti-closure." Others may very well find the unclosed ending in many additional poems. Ricks, for example, mentions at least twenty-seven poems—if my count is accurate—as illustrating Tennyson's art of the penultimate.

As I noted earlier, Barbara Herrnstein Smith has argued that successful closure gratifies the reader by releasing whatever tensions have been stimulated by the poem itself. But it is certainly possible, perhaps even necessary, to say now that Tennyson's unclosed poems gratify in ways Smith has not recognized. Like Keats's urn, which may "tease us out of thought," Tennyson's unclosed poems intend to gratify our sense of wonder, our delight in questing for, rather than arriving at, an emphatic, unambiguous meaning. They illustrate Carlyle's pronouncement, given in "Characteristics," published one year after Tennyson's *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical*, that incompleteness, rather than its opposite, is a truer manifestation of reality: "Perfection of Practice, like completeness of Opinion, is always approaching, never arrived: Truth, in the words of Schiller, *immer wird, nie ist*; never *is*, always *is a-being*."[22] The poems illustrate what Lawrence Starzyk has called "the metaphysics of becoming"—but with a distinctly Victorian slant. Starzyk holds that early Victorian poetics are Romantic in their metaphysical origins but "anti-Romantic in [their] essentially moral orientation."[23] The pattern of Tennyson's anti-closure supports Starzyk and simultaneously shows Tennyson's implicit endorsement of Schiller and Carlyle: those who would remove themselves from the society of their fellows, as the mariners, or those who yearn for death or, even, pray to God for death, are consistently denied the "end" they so desire.

It may be appropriate, in this penultimate section of the essay, to pause before the end and consider what the patterns of anti-closure in Tennyson suggest. I would suggest, first, that those poems in Tennyson which seem to exist in a state of suspended animation share some elements of style beyond their obviously unclosed endings. Nearly all the unclosed poems depend for part of their effect on repetition. "Mariana"'s refrains emphasize her weariness with almost narcotic effect, and "The Lady of Shalott"'s regular repetition of Camelot and Shalott emphasizes the two poles on which her life and death depend. More subtly colored within the poem but of no less importance to our understanding of character than the repetitions in the preceding poems, the repetitions of key words in "Ulysses" ("old") and in "Tithonus" ("immortal age") show that even in the dramatic monologues repetition makes up part of the pattern of anti-closure.

The importance of repetition to anti-closure is its ability to impede forward movement. The refrains in "Mariana" act as a dead weight and make each day for her much the same as the day before. No progress that way—and lack of progress, lack of change is clearly one of the points of the poem. Movement in "Ulysses" is retarded mainly by a more subtle kind of repetition than "Mariana"'s almost identical refrains. W. David Shaw, for example, comments sensitively on

Ulysses as a man "possessed by the magic of repose, [as] the slow, long-vowel movement produces a round-and-round hypnotic rhythm that enchants and beguiles him":[24]

> The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks:
> The long day wanes: the slow moon climbs: the deep
> Moans round with many voices.
> (R 565, 54-6)

Of course the use of three colons within two lines and two caesuras within a single line amount almost to a retrograde movement at the end of the poem. Repetition, then, impedes movement and contributes to our sense that the endings of so many of the poems are off the horizons of the poems themselves.

The resolutions which these central figures hope to pursue or realize illustrate further similarities in the unclosed poems—but also some important differences. In his observation that the dramatic monologues focus consistently on speakers near the point of death, Fredeman notes that "the propinquity of death" was a subject which attracted and fascinated Tennyson throughout his career, and although Fredeman writes mainly of that fascination's effect on the monologues, I think he would agree that other types of poems within the canon illustrate an almost deathless fascination with death itself.[25] It is important to recognize, however, that the unclosed poems do not embrace death as a resolution for whatever problems the poems depict—in fact, they do just the opposite. "Mariana" provides the most obvious example of a life that sees "no hope of change," of a woman tempted to commit suicide, of an abandoned lover who prays to God, in remarkable blasphemy, for death. The close so desired is death, but in resisting that close and in fact pointing through the Shakespearean allusion to another kind of ending altogether, the poem emphatically withholds death as a resolution. The case is nearly the same in "Tithonus" whose speaker pleads to an uncomprehending or at least silent Aurora for death as a release from the pain of immortal age. Again, the resolution of death so longed for is suppressed from the poem. The mariners in "The Lotus-Eaters" are clearly haunted by their parents' deaths but they do not, consciously, wish themselves to become "handfuls of white dust, shut in an urn of brass." Nevertheless, the rest they desire in the final lines comes uncomfortably close to the eternal rest of death; but that ending, too, is withheld from the poem. It would seem, then, that the pattern anti-closure takes in some poems is deliberately set against those who wish to die or those who confuse, as the mariners do, a "long rest" with a "dark death."

Although "The Lady of Shalott" ends in death and "Ulysses" comes uneasily close to death, both poems illustrate anti-closural patterns far different from the preceding set. The Lady of Shalott dies into a world far greater than isolated Shalott, and that world—Camelot and Lancelot—proclaims her importance as a figure who can move Lancelot himself and as a figure who will be recreated in art. Her death, in other words, is not an end at all since there are other "ends" off the edge of the poem which in fact give life. My argument, I realize, is primarily an esthetic one, but the importance of the poem in its two versions, in its allusions to the early poem "Sir Lancelot and Queen Guinevere," and in its anticipation of "Lancelot and Elaine" in the *Idylls* should be clear: to Tennyson the Lady has not died at all—unlike Mariana and Tithonus, she never sought death anyway—and she has been recreated in the poetic imagination. Death, at least esthetically, has been vanquished.

"Ulysses" sets itself apart from "Tithonus" and the other poems so in love with easeful death, but, as suggested earlier, it seems to belie Tennyson's claim that "it gives the feeling about the need of going forward." Some would argue that if the poem points to forward movement at all, it is a movement into certain death. But in his hope to move beyond the "bound of human thought," Ulysses actually resembles the unnamed speaker of the early "Armageddon," a poem in which time, space and being are "swallowed up and lost/ Within a victory of boundless thought" (R 72, 44-5). Nevertheless, Ulysses is much older than the young speaker of "Armageddon," and Tennyson himself was far more conscious of the recent loss of Hallam when, in 1833, the dramatic monologue placed its speaker on a dark shore gazing at a dim sea. "Ulysses" therefore resembles "Armageddon" in its wish to annihilate time and space, but it differs from the earlier poem in its wish to embrace the dead Hallam. The lack of closure in "Ulysses," then is wholly appropriate. The poem raises the possibility, firmly endorsed in "Vastness" that "the dead are not dead but alive," and anticipates that "we shall touch the Happy Isles,/ And see the great Achilles, whom we knew." Achilles—and Hallam—have not reached an end, so the poem, perforce, cannot end.

The pattern of "Ulysses," which looks backward and forward and, in its anticipation of the future, hopes to transcend time and space is imitated by *In Memoriam*. Even so, in the climactic trance section Tennyson creates a transcendent experience only wished for in the early "Ulysses" when the loss of Hallam was heavy upon him. The words of the trance section are well known, but they need to be read here within the context of the unclosed verse. We read in Section 95 that Tennyson's friends, one by one, withdrew from the outdoor scene and left him "alone," and that all is "silent." But as he begins to read the letters of the dead Hallam, the dead man himself seems to speak:

So word by word, and line by line,
The dead man touched me from the past,
And all at once it seemed at last
The living soul was flashed on mine,

And mine in this was wound, and whirled
About empyreal heights of thought,
And came on that which is, and caught
The deep pulsations of the world,

Æonian music measuring out
The steps of Time—the shocks of Chance—
The blows of Death.
(R 946-47, 33-43)

What happens next is, if anything, at least as remarkable as the transcendent experience; for just as the poet doubts what he has felt, the natural world responds in ways which cancel doubt itself. Dwight Culler beautifully describes the concluding lines of Section 95 as "nature's response to [Tennyson's] effort, Hallam's way of saying he has been heard":[26]

And sucked from out the distant gloom
A breeze began to tremble o'er
The large leaves of the sycamore,
And fluctuate all the still perfume,

And gathering freshlier overhead,
Rocked the full-foliaged elms, and swung
The heavy-folded rose, and flung
The lilies to and fro, and said

'The dawn, the dawn,' and died away;
And East and West, without a breath,
Mixt their dim lights, like life and death,
To broaden into boundless day.
(R 947, 53-64)

"Boundless." To transcend time, space, and being was a goal of the poetry from Tennyson's earliest years. The goal never entirely vanished, and the effort to imitate a transcendent journey into a world beyond human thought never entirely lost its fascination. The unclosed poems imitate, again and again, Tennyson's belief in a world and a life without end.

NOTES

[1]*The Poems of Tennyson*, ed. Christopher Ricks (London, 1969), p. 1405. Citations from the poetry in the body of this essay are taken from the Ricks (i.e., R) edition.

[2]See William E. Fredeman, "'A Sign Betwixt the Meadow and the Cloud': The Ironic Apotheosis of Tennyson's 'St Simeon Stylites'," *UTQ*, 38 (1968), 72, and Christopher Ricks, *Tennyson* (New York, 1972), p. 49.

[3]Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End* (Chicago, 1968), p. 3.

[4]For an example—though the focus is on Browning's endings—see Herbert F. Tucker, Jr., *Browning's Beginnings: The Art of Disclosure* (Minneapolis, 1980).

[5]Smith, p. 212.

[6]For a discussion on perfect repetition as an anti-closural force, see Smith, p. 57.

[7]Ricks, p. 50.

[8]James R. Kincaid, *Tennyson's Major Poems: The Comic and Ironic Patterns* (New Haven, 1975), p. 21.

[9]A. Dwight Culler, *The Poetry of Tennyson* (New Haven, 1977), p. 45.

[10]Tennyson quoted by F. E. L. Priestley, *Language and Structure in Tennyson's Poetry* (London, 1973), p. 47.

[11]James D. Kissane, *Alfred Tennyson* (New York,1970), p. 46.

[12]Edgar F. Shannon, Jr., "Poetry as Vision; Sight and Insight in 'The Lady of Shalott'," *VP* 19 (1981), 222.

[13]Ricks, p. 81.

[14]Shannon, pp. 222-223, sees in the conclusion "that the Lady fulfills the victory of love over death, just as in religious symbolism God's love through Christ's Passion redeems the world."

[15]William E. Fredeman, "One Word More—On Tennyson's Dramatic Monologues," in *Studies in Tennyson*, ed. Hallam Tennyson (Totowa, 1981), p. 180. Although he does not mention the "penultimate" element in the poems, Robert Langbaum's discussion of "Ulysses"—especially his comments on "weariness and longing for rest" as the "emotional bias" of the monologue—

remains an excellent treatment of a speaker who longs for an end undisclosed, as usual, in the poem itself. See Robert Langbaum, *The Poetry of Experience: The Dramatic Monologue in Modern Literary Tradition*. 1957. (rpt. New York, 1963), esp. pp. 89-91.

[16]See Hallam Tennyson, *Alfred Lord Tennyson: A Memoir* (New York, 1898), 1: 196.

[17]Matthew Arnold, "On Translating Homer, III," *Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, ed. R. H. Super (Ann Arbor, 1960), 1: 147.

[18]Goldwin Smith, "The War Passages in 'Maud'," *Saturday Review*, 3 November 1855, p. 14; rpr. in *Tennyson: The Critical Heritage*, ed. John D. Jump (London, 1967), p. 188.

[19]See R 565, note on ll. 66-69.

[20]W. David Shaw in *Tennyson's Style* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1976), p. 93, stresses how "the regular meter, reinforced by monosyllabic diction, produces a secure sense of ending."

[21]I quote from "Tithonus" rather than the earlier "Tithon" because I believe that revisions in the 1860 version do not significantly affect an unclosed reading.

[22]Thomas Carlyle, "Characteristics," *The Works of Thomas Carlyle*, ed. H. D. Traill (London, 1896-99), 28: 38.

[23]Lawrence Starzyk, "Towards a Reassessment of Early Victorian Aesthetics: The Metaphysical Foundations," *BJA*, 11 (1971), 171.

[24]Shaw, p. 87.

[25]Fredeman, "One Word More—On Tennyson's Dramatic Monologues," p. 180.

[26]Culler, p. 183.