ALFRED LORD TENNYSON

Selected Poetry

Edited with an Introduction by Herbert Marshall McLuhan

New York • *Rinehart & Company • Inc* • Toronto

Second Printing, August 1958

Typography and Cover Design by Stefan Salter
Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 56–7951

INTRODUCTION

I. EARLY YEARS

Alfred Tennyson (1809–1892) was the fourth of twelve children of the rector of Somersby, Lincolnshire. His grandfather, George Clayton Tennyson of Bayons Manor, was a wealthy, self-made man who disinherited his eldest son in early childhood. This act toward the poet's father, so contrary to English tradition and sentiment, was to cloud the life of Alfred Tennyson with the deepest hues. The poet's father was brought up for the Church against his will and left to rear his large family in a style much below the one to which he felt them and himself to be entitled.

The recent life of Tennyson by his grandson, Sir Charles Tennyson, reveals many family circumstances that may well render Tennyson a more sympathetic figure than the stately Druid who emerged from the first official memoir by his son. Central to this new story is "the misery and heartbreak through the bitterness and humiliation of the relations with Bayons." This misery led to the gradual deterioration and dipsomania of the poet's father. From this domestic turmoil Sir Charles derives the poet's "dread of personal publicity, the exaggerated hatred of gossip, and the morbid sense of sin which haunts such early poems as the 'Supposed Confessions.' "[1]

The family story as now presented has a direct bearing on "Maud," "Locksley Hall," "Aylmer's Field," and many other poems. And the melodrama of these pieces scarcely exceeds the events in the Tennyson family. The poet's father was a gifted but nervous and unstable man whom his wealthy father always regarded as a ridiculous object. The rich old man was as rigidly conventional and humorless as he was intensely snobbish and ambitious. His disinherited son, unable to bring up his large family in a lavish or ceremonious manner, and unwilling to

[1] Charles Tennyson, *Alfred Tennyson* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1949), pp. 537–538. Excerpts from this work are reprinted with the permission of The Macmillan Company.

accept the conventions of middle-class respectability, adopted the twentieth-century expedient of "progressive" or Bohemian family life. The arty, unceremonious ways of the rector's family infuriated the old martinet of Bayons. When Alfred's early volumes appeared, his uncle Charles (who had supplanted the rector of Somersby as heir of Bayons) had them scurrilously abused in print by his friend Bulwer-Lytton. And in 1850, when Alfred succeeded Wordsworth as poet laureate, Uncle Charles wrote of his nausea that "British taste and poetry should have such a representative before the nations of the Earth and Posterity."

Alfred Tennyson and his brothers and sisters grew up resentfully under the snobbish and scornful eye of their grandfather and in association with the irritable frustration of a father who was impatient of the injustice which had been done him and his children.

The poet's sweet and pious mother did not simplify the problems of her husband the rector. Gentle and indulgent to her children, she fed their vanity with endless praise of their artistic gifts but showed no ability to manage them or her household. Increasingly her husband's exasperation was directed toward her and eventually began to take a violent form. The children grew up amidst domestic horror which was only intensified by the deep affection they felt for both parents.

Unable to afford good schools for his children, the rector himself steered his precocious sons through a wide range of reading in ancient and modern languages. At fifteen, Alfred could easily write Latin, Greek, and English verses in all the conventional meters. Cut off from fashionable social life by poverty, the parents were encouraged by the rural character of the Somersby scene to give their children a sort of perpetual holiday license, so that the style of life at Somersby was nearer to the world of Huck Finn than to that of Jane Austen.[2] And all his life Tennyson continued to be a kind of shy but unconventional rustic. Yet his indifference to the manners and conventions of town life also

[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 34–35.

gave him a capacity for friendship with all types and classes which impressed the poet Fitzgerald.

The brooding, "black-blooded Tennysons" with their weak nerves and strong passions and constitutions were well typified in Alfred's elder brother, Frederick, whose "idealistic, passionate and unstable" personality is a factor in the formation of the Tennysonian heroes of "Locksley Hall," "Locksley Hall Sixty Years After," and "Maud." Writing of "Locksley Hall," Sir Charles says, "I have no doubt . . . that the story of cousins' love and family estrangement owes much of its form and atmosphere to the feud between Somersby and Bayons."[3]

II. THE PERSONALITY OF TENNYSON

Like the contradiction between the actualities of his home life and the saccharine image of domestic felicity in many of his poems, there is in Tennyson the contradiction between his actual dreaming, his remoteness from social existence, and his doctrinaire conviction that the way of escape from the dangers of excessive spiritual isolation was through wholehearted participation in the great stream of human experience and endeavor. There is an equally striking contradiction between his graceful lyric qualities and his giant physique. Tennyson was not only of great size but of great strength. On one occasion he amused Arthur Hallam by casually picking up a Shetland pony and carrying it around the lawn. His appearance and manner in 1840 as described in a letter of Carlyle's scarcely accords with the Druid image fostered by the photographers and painters of the later period: "A fine, large-featured, dim-eyed, bronze-coloured, shaggy-headed man is Alfred; dusty, smoky, free and easy; who swims outwardly and inwardly, with great composure in an articulate element as of tranquil chaos and tobacco smoke."[4]

And in another letter lamenting the fact that Tennyson was a poet, Carlyle calls him a "life-guardsman spoilt by making poetry." From the age of fourteen Tennyson was inseparable from a stubby

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 194.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 177.

pipe which he stuffed with the strongest shag tobacco. And he also ate and drank with great heartiness, and customarily spoke in a broad Lincolnshire accent not far removed from that of his Northern Farmer. His personal untidiness was as notorious as his nonchalance. He replied to a friend at Cambridge who pointed to the dirtiness of his shirt: "Yours wouldn't be half so clean, Heath, if you had worn it for a fortnight." Contradictorily associated with Tennyson's shyness and rusticity was a terrifying childlike directness: "In congenial company his complete lack of self-consciousness was apt to be embarrassing, for he would ask the most awkwardly direct questions and would speak whatever was in his mind with disturbing candour and a marked Lincolnshire accent."[5] Had D. H. Lawrence been a contemporary, he would no doubt have found in Tennyson a suitable gamekeeper hero for one of his romances. Tennyson's lack of self-consciousness, together with his complete confidence in his own powers, helped to make him an excellent mimic and reader of verse. As Sir Charles writes: "His manner of reading was entirely his own, a deep-voiced swinging chant in which rhythm and vowel sounds were emphasized at the expense of the ordinary dramatic emphasis and inflection. Yet he achieved a degree of emotion and dramatic force that was often quite overwhelming."[6]

Although uninhibited habits of expression characterized Tennyson among his friends, when with strangers, as one American poet wrote after a social encounter with him, "the great American three-minute ice-cream freezer would be a red-hot stove beside him." At the funeral of his friend Sir John Simeon in 1870:

> He arrived some time before the procession was due to leave the house, and asked his old friend's eldest son if he could give him a pipe of his father's and one of his cloaks and hats. "Come for me yourself," he added, "when it is time to start, and do not send a servant." When the moment arrived young Simeon went to fetch the poet. He found him stretched at full length on the ground, wearing the hat and cloak and smoking

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 56.
[6] *Ibid.*, p. 85.

the pipe. The tears were streaming down his face, and in his hand was a scrap of paper on which he had roughly jotted down the beautiful lines "In the Garden at Swainston."[7]

This strange amalgam of uninhibited emotionalism and pathic fear of society is seen from another point of view in the undergraduate "Cambridge Conversazione Society" (derisively referred to as "The Apostles"), which left its mark on Tennyson. In the meetings and membership of this exclusive group there was a combination of intensity and naïveté, ability and bathos which is sometimes explained by describing it as representative of the new middle class. This class, nurtured in nonconformity, social inferiority, pietistic earnestness, and new wealth, could hardly be expected to exhibit eighteenth-century poise or grace. Nor did it collectively have the homogeneity which had made possible a uniform tone in prose style in the eighteenth century, and which was perhaps last heard in Jane Austen. The enormous range of tone and attitude of style between Carlyle and Pater, Macaulay and Ruskin, Newman and Arnold, is merely the index of the breakup of the reading public into dozens of noncommunicating segments. Tennyson and Browning were unable to discover a tone or attitude which would have enabled them to direct any prose to their dimly seen publics. Newman fell back on the note of private Oxford conversation. Ruskin took over the shrill emphasis of the pulpit. Arnold assumed the antiseptic note of the civil servant producing a government blue book on literary conditions. The industrial developments had set the whole society in motion so that in taste and manners there was universal uncertainty and experiment.

Alfred and two of his brothers had an extremely unpleasant time for a few years at Louth grammar school. Then from 1820 until his entry at Cambridge in 1828 Alfred was under the strenuous tuition of his father. This was the period of his devotion to the poetry of Scott and Byron, and to the Elizabethan dramatists. Wordsworth, Shelley, and Keats he seems not to have discovered before Cambridge.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 389.

After the rural isolation of Somersby, Trinity College, Cambridge, was a tremendous experience, and Tennyson wrote:

> *For I could burst into a psalm of praise*
> *Seeing the heart so wondrous in her ways.*
> *Would I could pile fresh life on life and dull*
> *The sharp desire of knowledge still with knowing.*
> *Art, Science, Nature, everything is full*
> *As my own soul is full to overflowing.*[8]

Like Wordsworth he did not take kindly to the formal studies then in vogue and became a vehement critic of the traditional curriculum with its heavy mathematical bias. Arthur Hallam came up to Trinity from Eton the same year, compact of erudition, genius, gaiety, idealism, and great social gifts. Both Hallam and Tennyson were soon elected to "The Apostles," who declined on principle to spell "oxford" with a capital "o", one of them observing: "I often wonder what we have done to deserve being gifted, as we are, so much above those cursed idiotic oxford brutes."[9] Before this group, in 1831, Hallam read his essay "Theodicaea Novissima" on the problem of good and evil in creation. This Manichean tract is typical of the discussions of religion and belief which occupied much of the conversation and thoughts of Hallam and Tennyson, and which provided the typical sentiments on these subjects that appear in "In Memoriam" and the later poems.[10]

Hallam met and fell in love with Alfred's sister Emily at Christmas in 1829. He and Tennyson had projected a joint publication of their poetry, but in 1830 Hallam at the last minute modestly withdrew his work from the company of Tennyson's *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical.* Coleridge's comment on Tennyson's experiments with irregular verse forms and speech stress in this volume

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[8] *Ibid.*, p. 57.

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 73.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 82. For text of talk see T. H. Vail Motter, *The Writings of Arthur Hallam* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1943), pp. 198–212.

was that Tennyson appeared to have begun writing poetry without any clear idea of meter.

In 1830 Tennyson became the member of a mysterious military expedition to Spain whose leader, Boyd, was captured and executed. The next year the death of his father brought pressure on him and his brothers Frederick and Charles to take holy orders. Alfred came down from Cambridge without a degree. Tennyson's life now entered on two decades of misfortunes and depression which did not end until 1850: tense family relations, the hostility of critics, the death of Hallam, poor health, the frustration of his hopes to marry Emily Sellwood, and the loss of his patrimony through a bad investment. However, he worked at his poetry, and after leaving Somersby in 1837 he began to circulate in London, becoming friendly with many leading men, including Gladstone, Dickens, Carlyle, and Edward Fitzgerald. In spite of this period of misfortune, Tennyson seems never to have had to work at anything except his poetry, his private income always enabling him to eke out a living.

Still in the nineteenth century, and even today, the literary and artistic life of London had an informal clublike character which is not easily imagined by those accustomed only to the arrangements of this continent. There, people of common interests took for granted regular meetings and much conversation, so that a man did not need to have done very much in order to have regular access to the company of eminent artists and writers. The twenty years that Tennyson passed in obscurity and neglect were by our standards years of intense social and intellectual activity.

The 1842 volume, *Poems,* containing "Morte d'Arthur" and many of his best-known pieces, was brushed off by the critics, as was *The Princess* in 1847. But in 1850 everything changed very suddenly. He married Emily Sellwood; *The Princess* began to sell; he suddenly decided to publish his *Book of Elegies* ("In Memoriam") anonymously. It was an instant success, selling 60,000 copies in a few months. In their enthusiastic reception of "In Memoriam" the critics agreed that though it was a great poem it could not expect to be popular. However, Tennyson himself

described it as a "Way of the Soul," which locates it in the company of the literature of spiritual quests—a record of separate moments of growth and illumination, moving from the early astonishment and confusion of grief through a gradual affirmation mediating between pain and acceptance to the finale of peace and joy.[11] This poem led Queen Victoria to offer Tennyson the laureateship.

After this, the poet became a national institution. From the sale of his verse within a few years he became a wealthy man. Part of the dynamics of this movement can be seen from Gertrude Stein's description of the influence of Victorian imperialism on writing:

> . . . in the nineteenth century . . . in order to understand, it must be understood that explaining was invented, naturally invented by those living a daily island life and owning everything else outside. They owned everything inside of course but that they had always done, but now they owned everything outside and that reinforced their owning everything inside, and that was as it was only more so but as they owned everything outside, outside and inside had to be told something about all this owning, otherwise they might not remember all this owning and so there was invented explaining and that made nineteenth century English literature what it is. And with explaining went emotional sentimental feeling because of course it had to be explained all the owning had to be told about its being owned about its owning and anybody can see that if island daily life were to continue its daily existing there must be emotional sentimental feeling.[12]

Tennyson became a voice for England and there began the Victorian myth of the "easy" Tennyson. But within the brightness of this fame and success there was hidden the obscure and minute art of a poet whose work had at first baffled the best minds of his

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[11] Compare the treatment in A. C. Bradley, *A Commentary on Tennyson's "In Memoriam"* (London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1901).

[12] Gertrude Stein, *Lectures in America* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1935), p. 40.

age. His sophisticated art has long been hidden from our eyes by the exhalation of his public Victorian aura, "epiphanized" by Joyce in the phrase "Alfred lawn Tennyson."

III. TENNYSON TODAY

The Tennyson which the twentieth century has decided to bury is now regarded as the Polonius of his age, the intoner of "self-knowledge, self-reverence, self-control." The Tennyson we have agreed to resurrect is the lyricist and landscapist. The choice has been between the Polonian and the Apollonian Tennyson. Divested of the mask of Polonius, Tennyson can be made to appear as a modern and morbid sensibility such as we have had presented by T. S. Eliot and W. H. Auden. Eliot has written: "There is no evidence in his poetry that he knew the experience of violent passion for a woman; but there is plenty of evidence of emotional intensity and violence—but of emotion so deeply suppressed even from himself, as to tend rather towards the blackest melancholia than towards dramatic action."[13]

Taking his cue from "blackest melancholia," Auden has presented Tennyson as the English Baudelaire: "Both felt themselves to be exiles from a lost paradise, desert dwellers (the barren rocks and desolate fens of Tennyson correspond to the gas-lit Paris of Baudelaire); both shared the same nostalgia for the Happy Isles, *le vert paradis des amours enfantines*, to be reached only after long voyages over water; both imagine Eden in the same Rousseauistic terms; i.e., as a place of natural innocence rather than spiritual illumination." And Tennyson's "poems deal with human emotions in their most primitive states, uncomplicated by conscious sexuality or intellectual rationalization."[14]

The twentieth century has established a view of the Romantics and Victorians as typically engaged in the elaboration of a dream world. And their practice is regarded as defeatist in an age which has sought to affirm once more the role of wit and intellect in the

[13] T. S. Eliot, "In Memoriam," *Essays Ancient and Modern* (London: Faber & Faber, Ltd., 1946), p. 181.

[14] W. H. Auden, "Introduction" to *Poems of Alfred Lord Tennyson* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., n.d.), pp. xviii–xix.

shaping of works of art. In a chapter on Tennyson, E. D. H. Johnson concludes that Tennyson's bias was toward the inner vision and the dream life.[15] In similar fashion, Douglas Bush sees in Tennyson a poet in whom the actual world inspired "a temperamental melancholy, a brooding, a wistful sense of the past, an unappeasable desiderium . . . a cry of profound sadness and bewilderment."[16]

Tennyson's art has two major aspects which are indispensable for an understanding of the poets who preceded and followed him. These aspects are the picturesque and the little epic or "epyllion." The picturesque includes the whole range of his landscape effects; the epyllion concerns his method in ballad, narrative, and monologue. Tennyson's picturesque component is bound by technique and theory to the romantic impressionism of poetry from Thomson's *Seasons* to the work of Keats and Shelley. Tennyson's epyllia make him the erudite follower of Theocritus, Catullus, and Virgil, whose cultivation of the little epic form of the Alexandrine poetry really places him in close rapport with the art form of Joyce's *Dubliners*, Eliot's *Waste Land*, and Pound's *Cantos*.

IV. TENNYSON AND THE PICTURESQUE

The picturesque Tennyson of 1830 had an elaborate aesthetic theory and grandiose poetic ambitions which are explained in the remarkable manifesto by Arthur Hallam which introduced him to an indifferent public.[17] In 1893 W. B. Yeats found Hallam's essay an invaluable aid in the understanding of French symbolism. Although written with the flourish of a Macaulay, it is as subtle and compressed as Eliot's early prose, and there are few of Eliot's doctrines of poetry and communication which Hallam fails to pronounce. The reason is perhaps that. like Eliot, Hallam is seeking in poetry a means of the highest spiritual illumination.

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[15] E. D. H. Johnson, *The Alien Vision of Victorian Poetry* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1952), p. 63.

[16] Douglas Bush, *Mythology and the Romantic Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1933), p. 227.

[17] See Appendix for text.

For this reason he regards ideas and rhetoric of little avail. Hallam is confident that Tennyson's technique of the picturesque has enabled him to surpass the descriptive rhetoric of Wordsworth and Shelley in isolating those pure states of consciousness which are not of "time's covenant." He asks us to study Tennyson with a minute and exacting intensity such as we ordinarily reserve for the greatest achievements of metaphysical and scientific speculation.[18]

Hallam rightly insists on contrasting descriptive poetry and picturesque poetry, because the picturesque artist aims not just at the vivid rendering of a scene. As in Wordsworth's "Solitary Reaper" or Tennyson's "Mariana," the picturesque poet is consciously manipulating a magical formula. The external situation is employed as a magical device for eliciting a precise mental state in the reader. From Sir Philip Sidney in the sixteenth century to Alexander Pope, poetic art was typically directed to the shaping of the poetic object; from the pre-Romantics, Thomson, Gray, Collins, Akenside, and Chatterton, to the present, poetic art has consciously applied itself to the shaping of psychological effects in the reader. This could be called the Copernican revolution in poetry. It is, somewhat obscurely, the theme of Wordsworth's "Preface to the Lyrical Ballads"; it is plainly the theme of Hallam's essay on Tennyson's *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical;* it is usually the theme of Walter Pater and of T. S. Eliot. As seen by Hallam, the poet is not concerned with ideas, opinions, beliefs, except as means to an effect: "whenever the mind of the artist suffers itself to be occupied, during its periods of creation, by any other predominant motive than the desire of beauty, the result is false in art."[19]

This is the key to picturesque or symbolist theory and practice of art and communication. It is frankly a magical and "irrational" theory which envisages art as a means of exploring and charting

[18] For fuller discussion see H. M. McLuhan, "Tennyson and Picturesque Poetry," *Essays in Criticism,* I (July, 1951), 262–282, and H. M. McLuhan, "The Esthetic Moment in Landscape Poetry," *English Institute Essays, 1951* (ed. Alan S. Downer; New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), pp. 168–181.

[19] See Appendix for text.

exactly discriminated mental states, on one hand, and of evoking these newly discovered states in the reader, on the other hand, not indirectly, but by direct participation. Regarded in this way, Tennyson's habitual stress on a combination of music and pictures as a magical or hypnotic procedure will make sense. His experiments with varied verse forms are always linked to this predominant interest in the effect of the aesthetic moment. Moreover, poetry written to capture and elaborate a momentarily sensed dimension of emotion or feeling tends to be a small unit. Tennyson, it is recognized, is most effective in the brief flight and even in the line flash.

Between Tennyson's and T. S. Eliot's theory of art and communication there is small difference. In their practice, however, there are many distinctions which can be discovered by detailed acquaintance with their work. But in dispensing with the poetic uses of intellect and wit, Tennyson is closer to the early Yeats than to Eliot. Tennyson avoided wit for reasons as deliberate as led Eliot to bring it back to poetry. It was not a matter of temperament but of doctrinaire conviction.

V. TENNYSON AND THE LITTLE EPIC OR EPYLLION

In studying the theory and practice of the picturesque in Tennyson the student will find the comparison with and contrast of Arnold's poetry very useful. Arnold rejected the aesthetic views of Hallam, Tennyson, and the Romantics so far as they followed the magical line in poetry and art. In practice, too, he preferred description, narrative, and reflective comment to the magical evocation of the aesthetic moment or flash of illumination. In his 1853 Preface to *Poems* Arnold attacks the magical school as episodic, fragmentary, and sensational, arguing that the true business of art is not the sudden flash of insight but the gradual catharsis of emotion. Recently in *The Gate of Horn*, G. R. Levy has explained how the Greek conception of catharsis via the arts was that of character training, a preparation for "the lesser mysteries" of the Eleusinian rites. This seems to have been Arnold's point of view as well as that of the very large and articulate school of critics and educators for whom the arts are

a school of ethics and moral discipline. The magical and symbolist school, on the other hand, in preferring to use the arts as a means of *gnosis* or spiritual elevation and discovery, would seem to associate the arts not with the lesser but with "the greater mysteries," as the Greeks called them. The so-called art of the little epic (the idyll and epyllion) was a late Greek form associated with magical rituals. It was especially cultivated by Theocritus, who was Tennyson's favorite poet. Theocritus and the Alexandrian school were directly responsible for "the new poetry" of Catullus, Ovid, and Virgil. The work of Theocritus, Catullus, Ovid, and Virgil, masters of the epyllion, needs to be known for any deep understanding of Tennyson's technique in narrative poetry. But the discontinuous technique of the epyllion is equally the clue to the art form of *Dubliners*, of *The Waste Land*, and of *The Cantos*.[20]

Professor Crump describes the epyllion as follows:

> . . . a short narrative poem. The length may and does vary considerably, but an epyllion seems never to have exceeded the length of a single book, and probably the average length was four to five hundred lines. The subject is sometimes merely an incident in the life of an epic hero or heroine, sometimes a complete story, the tendency of the author being to use little-known stories or possibly even to invent new ones. The later Alexandrians and Romans preferred love stories and usually concentrated the interest on the heroine. . . . The dramatic form is frequently employed, and it is usual to find at least one long speech.[21]

In practice the epyllion was closely linked to the Alexandrian art of the idyll or little picture, the little epic being frequently a series of such pictures with narrative links. When these links are suppressed, the mere juxtaposition or parataxis of scenes tends (as in *The Waste Land*) to establish a dramatic mode for the

[20] D. F. Theall and the present writer are preparing a study of the epyllion from Ovid to the present.

[21] M. M. Crump, *The Epyllion from Theocritus to Ovid* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell & Mott, Ltd., 1931), p. 22.

poem. In the same way, simile with its linkages is nearer to narrative than dramatic metaphor, which suppresses the links between its various terms. And symbolism (as its etymology implies) is the art of juxtaposing without links. That is to say, symbolism is a gnomic, riddling art, a magical technique for casting and exorcising spells. Such was the mode of the idylls of Theocritus and the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid.

In all times and places the poet has been accorded some degree of magical power over the minds of his audience. The Romantics and the symbolists began to urge these claims in theory and in practice. They did not stop with the poet's power over the mind, but claimed, like the mathematical physicist today, that his creations had the power to influence the universe as well. This symbolic view of the poet is the theory of the culture-hero, variously developed by Carlyle, Nietzsche, and Shaw. Obviously, it is at variance with the traditions of rationalism. The student of Tennyson will find that Tennyson was never able to make up his mind about the opposing claims of the magical and rational theories of art and communication. "The Palace of Art" is a monument to his early indecision. The problem can be stated briefly in these terms: Is art a civilized *substitute* for tribal magic or is it a refined *continuation* of tribal magic? From Plato to the present, poets, critics, and philosophers have been divided over this issue. But the vogue of modern anthropology has for fifty years weighted the literary scales heavily in favor of the magical thesis.

In antiquity the cyclic epic of Homer and Hesiod moved away from primitive magic toward a rational and limited social function. This process is explained at length by G. R. Levy in *The Sword from the Rock.* The hero task of removing the sword from the rock (as performed by Arthur and many others) is figurative of the separation of man's individual spiritual life from the collective rites of the Old Stone Age culture. Nevertheless, the cyclic epic retains the structure of the solar cycle, and from this comes its twelve- (or twenty-four-) book structure. The little epic, on the other hand, was a deliberate return to religious ritual and magic. Virgil was the first to fuse the solar or cyclic epic with the

magical form of the little epic. In this fusion Virgil was followed by Dante, Milton, and Tennyson. In *Four Quartets* T. S. Eliot has effected a new kind of fusion of cyclic and little epic, as have Joyce and Pound in even more complex ways.

Whereas the cyclic epic, as in Homer, moves on the single narrative plane of individual spiritual quest, the little epic as written by Ovid, Dante, Joyce, and Pound is "the tale of the tribe." That is to say, it is not so much a story of the individual quest for perfection as it is a history of collective crime and punishment, an attempt to justify the ways of God to man. From this point of view "In Memoriam," like Petrarch's *Sonnets*, is a seasonal cycle of little epics or idylls in the form of the individual quest. And the *Idylls of the King* is the collective quest, the tale of the tribe. The twelve idylls follow the cycle of the zodiac, each book corresponding faithfully to the traditional character of the twelve "houses" of the zodiac.[22] By following this traditional zodiacal track Tennyson was able over a long period to compose his twelve idylls in any order he found convenient.

The pattern of collective quest lends the prominent salvation note to the *Idylls of the King* and explains his philosophy of history. "The Coming of Arthur" is thus the coming of the culture-hero, and Arthur's struggles with the demonic earth powers are the theme of the cycle.[23] The masculine-feminine duality of most of Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* may have been suggested to him by the similar aspects of each house of the zodiac. For each planet's day home is located in a positive masculine sign and its night home in a negative or feminine sign.[24]

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[22] See Nicholas De Vore's *Encyclopedia of Astrology* (New York: The Philosophical Library, 1947).

[23] From this point of view, Paul Tillich's chapters on the demonic in history (*The Interpretation of History* [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936], p. 98) provide a useful discussion of Tennyson's theme: "The real observation of history has to do with the phenomena which are perceptible but in which the depth can manifest itself: the battle of the divine against the demonic, the powerful coming of 'salvation.'" See also Charles Williams, *Arthurian Torso* (ed. C. S. Lewis; London: Oxford University Press, 1948).

[24] Curiously, however, as Elsdale points out in his *Studies in the Idylls* (London: Henry S. King & Co., 1878), pp. 28–29, the rational soul for Tennyson is viewed as the feminine figure in "Gareth and Lynette," for