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TENNYSON'S IDYLLS OF THE KING

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INTRODUCTION

The inception of the *Idylls of the King* occurred in 1832 with Alfred Lord Tennyson's poem, "The Lady of Shallot". At this time, Tennyson was twenty-three years old and had left Cambridge the year before. The *Idylls* were not published in their entirety until 1888, when Tennyson was seventy-eight years old and had reigned as poet laureate for thirty-eight years. Critics have questioned the unity of a work written over fifty-six years.

Tennyson fell into disfavor with the New Critics who claimed his work lacked profound thoughts, but even they lauded Tennyson's talent as a craftsman. Tennyson was concerned with the relationship or words and phrases, and how words interact to achieve the desired effect. He followed well Arthur Hallam's tenet that "... the perfect poem is one in which everything speaks." Is it then illogical to assume that anyone concerned with the detailed interaction of words and phrases in his poems would ignore structural unity in his most ambitious and greatest work, even though he wrote the work over a fifty-six year team span.

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1. Tennyson and Browning are poets, and they think; but they do not feel their thoughts as immediately as the odour of a rose." T. S. Eliot, *The Great Critics* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1960), p. 711.

2. "Tennyson is perhaps the last English poet one would think of associating with the subtleties of paradox and ambiguity. He is not the thoughtless poet, to be sure, but..." Cleanth Brooks, *The Well Wrought Urn* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, 1947), p. 9.

The possibility exists that Tennyson failed to achieve structural unity in *Idylls of the King*, but I will argue the *Idylls* are twelve separate poems having structural unity. This paper will explore all the various interpretations showing the *Idylls'* unity and will attempt to demonstrate which interpretation is most valid.

W. David Shaw, W. S. Johnson, Edward Engelberg, Roy Gridley, Boyd Litzinger, and Lawrence Poston, III, have written excellent studies of the unity within a single idyll or of a single image or idea unifying the entire *Idylls*. The most inclusive studies of the *Idylls*’ structure are F. E. L. Priestley's "Tennyson's *Idylls*," Clyde de L. Ryals' *From the Great Deep*, and the ninth chapter of Jerome Buckley's


Ryals, op. cit., pp. 1-204.
Tennyson, the Growth of a Poet. Priestley discusses the spiritual values Arthur brings to the people and how several characters react to these ideals. Ryals discusses the characters; the sea, fire, and animal imagery; many of the contrasts; and the theme of illusion. Buckley notes, "Though a few of the characters recur as links between some of the idylls, the unity of the sequence lies not in action or plot but in theme, imagery, and atmosphere." Buckley's chapter is most comprehensive, and he shows how the Idylls are unified according to his theory. However, none of these critics has explored all facets of the Idylls' unity. The purpose of this paper is to explore all possibilities.

The first chapter will discuss the way each idyll is related by a major unifying plot. Next, in conjunction with the plot discussion will be a discussion of the characters and their function in the separate idylls. This characterization study will be discussed in conjunction with the possibility that Tennyson meant for his Idylls to be a study of different types of people and how they affect a society. Going further with the characterizations, I will study two institutions --Marriage and the Knightly Code--and their effect on people. Using Jerome Buckley's basic idea that theme, imagery, and atmosphere unify the Idylls, chapter four will show how the cyclic pattern of the atmosphere (seasons), seven image patterns (Buckley discusses three), and

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12Ibid., p. 173.
various themes give the Idylls unity.

The idea that the Idylls' unity rests on its allegorical meanings does not merit an entire chapter. Allegorical inferences can add to the characterizations: Arthur represents religious faith, Guinevere represents fleshly desires, Merlin represents intellect or magic, Vivien and Modred represent sin, Enid represents patience, Bors represents humility, Galahad represents purity, Pellam represents hypocrisy, Gareth represents youthful idealism, and Pelleas represents disillusioned youthful idealism. However, a completely allegorical reading of the Idylls oversimplifies it too much, because the characters' function is not just to represent abstractions and moral qualities. Also, appropriate allegorical labels are not possible for all major characters. If the Idylls of the King is an allegory, then Lancelot, Lynette, Geraint, Balin, Elaine, and Etтарре must represent some readily apparent moral quality. Lancelot represents the human potential for greatness marred by his fallibility in love. Lynette is a proud, imperceptive, domineering young woman. Geraint is another potentially great man nearly ruined by his imperceptiveness. Balin is an unstable character trying to conquer his weakness. Elaine is a naive unsophisticated young woman unable to cope with life's realities. Etтарге is a pleasure-seeking woman with few morals, but she reforms. None of these characters, however, represents a definite moral quality or abstraction which is necessary if the Idylls is a wholly allegorical poem.

Before discussing the unity of the Idylls of the King, some background information is necessary. First, the source for the Idylls is,
obviously, the Arthurian legend. Tennyson uses Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*, which he first read as a boy, as the source for most of his idylls. However, the Geraint and Enid story draws from the Welsh *Mabinogion*\(^{13}\) while "Guinevere" comes primarily from Tennyson's imagination.\(^{14}\) Tennyson changed some of Malory's characters, and the chapter on characterization discusses these changes. Wanting to omit some aspects of Malory's characters, Tennyson was faced with the problem of just how much he should alter the characters from the original story. Jerome Buckley relates:

> By 1868, a literal belief in the legend no longer seemed essential to its execution; for the poet, working in a symbolic mode, felt unconstrained by the standards of "realism" that had prevailed in the *Enoch Arden* volume. With a firm aesthetic control he boldly adapted his own vision, now sharp and coherent, of the Arthurian world.\(^{15}\)

Also, the name idylls is important in understanding Tennyson's purpose. The idyll Tennyson uses is not the pastoral poem describing a simple tranquil scene of domestic life, as are the idylls of Theocritus. Tennyson's work fits more closely the definition of an epic: a long narrative poem centering around the adventures of Arthur, an heroic character, with supernatural happenings and warfare always a part of the action. However, two things keep Tennyson's story from meeting epic requirements. First, the epic conventions of beginning *in medias res*,


\(^{14}\)Ibid., p. 536.

\(^{15}\)Buckley, *op. cit.*, p. 171.
of the invocation of a muse, of using cataloging passages, and of stating an epic purpose are absent. Secondly, and more importantly, the Idylls of the King concerns not only King Arthur but the people in Camelot as well. In fact, Arthur is hardly present in the story except in "The Coming of Arthur" and "The Passing of Arthur". He stands always in the background but rarely figures prominently in the action.

If the Idylls of the King is not an idyll nor an epic, what exactly is it? Clyde de L. Ryalls suggests that the work most properly is an "epyllion or epic idyll". Jerome Buckley offers this solution: "... he [Tennyson] must in any case have expected his title Idylls--in the plural--to designate not a single unified narrative but a group of chivalric tableau selected from a great mass of available legend." The latter solution best suits Tennyson's purposes. If Tennyson wanted to write an epic, he certainly would have described Arthur's adventures in detail, or like Malory, he could have made Lancelot or Tristram the hero whose exploits are described at length. By using twelve separate idylls, Tennyson shows different pictures of life in Camelot; and only as a composite can these twelve idylls truly depict what happens in Arthur's kingdom of Camelot.

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16 Clyde de L. Ryals, op. cit., p. 18.

17 Buckley, op. cit., p. 172.
CHAPTER ONE

Plot is a series of related events leading up to a climax. The climax or turning point of the story can be the final action of the work, or the author in the falling action after the climax can close the story. If a plot tightly organizes the Idylls, then presumably, a related plan of action connects each idyll. A study of the Idylls decides what is the related action. The first idyll, "The Coming of Arthur," describes the kingdom of Cameliard before Arthur's appearance, the details of Arthur's birth and marriage, and Arthur's founding of the Round Table. However, Arthur is not prominently in the action again until six idylls later, in "Lancelot and Elaine". Although at first glance the story seems like a tale of King Arthur's adventures, obviously the Idylls relate more than just stories about Arthur.

If the Idylls are not about Arthur, the next logical assumption is that they mainly relate the adventures of his knights, the men following the King and making up his Round Table. The author helps reinforce this idea by excluding the first and last books, "The Coming of Arthur" and "The Passing of Arthur," and grouping the other ten books under the subtitle "The Round Table". To explore this plot possibility necessitates examining "The Round Table". First is the tale of Gareth, Arthur's nephew, who, disguised as a kitchen slave, battles against the Knights of Day, Night, and Death, saving the Lady Lyonors. Next is the tale of Geraint. Two books tell about this knight, although very little of either book describes his exploits as a knight. The author relates how
Geraint battles with the Sparrow Hawk Edyrn, three unknown nights, Earl Limours, and Earl Doorm. However, these battles are secondary to the main plot of the two Geraint books, his marital difficulties and how he overcomes them. The next idyll concerns Balin and Balan, the two brother knights. This idyll does not describe the adventures of the two brothers very much. Balan rides off to fight a "Christless foe" of Arthur's, and nothing more is told of him until he inadvertently kills his brother at the end of the chapter. His brother Balin "the savage" is the main character of the idyll. Tennyson tells very little of his adventures other than his confrontation with Pellam and Garlon, Vivien and her retinue, and his brother. The "Balin and Balan" chapter is a personality study of Balin, of how he temporarily overcomes his black moods but finally succumbs to them again.

To judge from the last three idylls mentioned, the Idylls would offer principally the personalities of Arthur's major knights, rather than stories of their heroic adventures. This overriding design of unity is not a plan of action, but fits better under a characterization study, where the study of people and their personalities gives importance to the story's events and not vice versa. Since the next idyll "Merlin and Vivien" does not concern any of the knights, obviously their adventures are not the main plot of the Idylls.

So far, a tight plan of action directly linking each idyll to the preceding and following idylls does not seem to unify the work. The characters and action Tennyson develops in one idyll are not necessarily continued or developed in the next idyll.
Further examinations would show there is no tightly structured plot for the *Idylls of the King*. At this point, a more useful discussion would involve the possibility of a loose plot structured around one central unifying idea. If Tennyson uses a loose plot, then each idyll deals with different people in different situations and, there is not necessarily a continuity of characters or action from one idyll to the next. Each idyll's significance does not become completely apparent until the work is studied as a whole. With a loose plot, Tennyson tells a different story in each idyll while he is telling one story when all twelve idylls are combined. A study of the *Idylls* as a whole shows the main unifying plot connecting the individual idylls. Marriages in Camelot is a loose plot worthy of discussion. The first idyll, "The Coming of Arthur," describes his marriage to Guinevere. The following book about Gareth and Lynette is the courting of Gareth and his lady, Lynette or Lyonors. The Geraint books centers around the courting and marital problems of Geraint and Enid. "Balin and Balan" has nothing about a marriage of either knight, unless one wants to think of Balin and Balan's joining Arthur's Order as being a marriage; but surely this is stretching the point. "Merlin and Vivien" concerns a sexual union outside of marriage. Vivien flatters Merlin. He has no intention of marrying her. Vivien does not want a husband, but she desires Merlin's power. "Lancelot and Elaine" and "Pelleas and Ettarre" describe the attraction of a single person for another single person, although marriage is not the end result. "The Last Tournament" treats two adulterous affairs: Tristram and Mark's wife Isolt and Guinevere and Lanceolot. The only other
mention of marriage is in "Guinevere" where the estranged husband and guilty wife see each other for a last time before Arthur's death. Since marriage does not account for the action in each idyll, Camelot's marriages are not the overriding unifying plot of the work.

The related idea of Arthur's love and the loves of his knights is another loose plot possibility. Eight idylls fit this idea. "The Coming of Arthur" tells of the vows Arthur and his queen make at their marriage. "Gareth and Lynette" tells of Gareth's knightly courtesy and his eventual love. The Geraint books describe Enid's devoted love to Geraint and Geraint's jealous love for his wife. "Lancelot and Elaine" describes Elaine's worship of Lancelot and his platonic love for her. "Pelleas and Ettarre" describes the young knight's lustful love for Ettarre. "The Last Tournament" relates the story of Tristram and Isolt's affair. And in the "Guinevere" idyll, Tennyson gives Guinevere's feelings of love for both Lancelot and Arthur.

These loves fall clearly into categories. The pure love in the marriage of Arthur and Enid and the pure love of an unmarried person—Elaine and Gareth—are similar. The jealous loves of Geraint and Guinevere, and the lustful loves of Pelleas and Tristram, as well as the adulterous loves of Isolt and Tristram and Guinevere and Lancelot, contrast with the pure loves. This idea of the loves in Camelot encompasses the most idylls in one plot so far, but still not all the idylls; so the loves in Camelot are not the plot unifying all the idylls.

An unresolved examination of various plot strands discussed so far suggests that an even broader plot must unify the work. The Idylls
of the King is a narrative poem because it tells a story; so the work must have some plot, even if it is a very loose plot. A plot of a philosophical nature relating the rise and decay of a potentially ideal society encompasses all the plots heretofore mentioned. This plot shows through the adventures of Arthur how the King tries to bring his ideals of behavior to his people. A study of the knights' loves shows how the inhabitants of Camelot react to their King's ideals. An analysis of Camelot's marriages, which should be a stabilizing factor in the society, demonstrates how unbalanced and illicit relationships can cause the decay of a potentially ideal society.

The rise and fall of a potentially ideal society is the plot unifying the twelve separate poems. However, this plot at best only brings together several other plot strands, and an attempt to discuss one tightly woven plot of the Idylls of the King becomes marked by confusion. The plot of the Idylls is a loose one, superficially justifying the inclusion of each of the twelve poems. However, this plot does not tightly structure the work, and a better unifying principle must be found.
CHAPTER TWO

In his *Idylls of the King*, Tennyson has fifty-eight characters, twelve of them major. Although a few function as links between some of the idylls, most appear in only one idyll. Seemingly, this is not an important unifying device. However, the characters give great unity to the poem in two ways. For one thing, Tennyson categorizes the fifty-eight characters; the characters will be discussed at length to show why they fit into the various categories. Also, Tennyson makes a distinction between the builders and the destroyers, and the characters' intent determines their category. The builders help Arthur construct his kingdom based on the King's idealism. The destroyers do not want Arthur's ideal kingdom to succeed. Under these two broad groups are two more groups: the imperceptive and the perceptive people. The imperceptive people are mostly idealists who cannot accurately judge how well Arthur is succeeding in Camelot. There are also destroyers who want to ruin the King because they perceive how well he is doing. Tennyson also describes perceptive people not wanting Arthur to fail but seeing weaknesses in his grand plan. Within these categories, Tennyson sets up contrasting and similar characters through the *Idylls*. These contrasts and similarities exaggerate or play down certain character traits and help give unity to

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to the twelve separate idylls as Tennyson constantly compares the characters to each other.

Also, characters have functions in their separate stories as well as in the total plot. Tennyson determines characters' functions by the type of people they are. A close study of how each character functions in the individual idyll or idylls establishes how well Arthur is succeeding in his work and foreshadows the action in the next idyll. An examination of characters considers what functions characters serve within the idyll as well as in the entire work, and this is the second way in which characters unify the Idylls. Also, if Tennyson changes the corresponding character from Sir Thomas Malory's LeMorte D'Arthur, he has a reason. At the same time, if Tennyson retains Malory's character intact, he also has a reason. Therefore, included in the character discussion is a study of why Tennyson changes or retains Malory's characters.

One other point requires clarification before proceeding with the character discussion. There are major and minor characters in the Idylls. The action of an individual idyll focuses on one or two major characters. The actions of these major characters make up the greatest part of the plot in an individual idyll. Tennyson describes major characters well mentally and physically, and the plot of the idylls cannot exist without them. While the minor characters are also indispensable, Tennyson describes them only as much as is necessary to establish their relationship to a major character. The function of minor characters is to aid in the action of the story or to contrast or parallel the major character's personality. An interesting aspect of the characterizations is the
The author's use of three characters—Arthur, Guinevere, and Lancelot—as major characters in some idylls and as minor characters in others. Tennyson does this not only to provide unity among the idylls but to give a fuller personality study of each character. Also, Gawain, Modred, and Percivale appear in more than one idyll, helping connect the idylls and giving a better perspective on these minor characters. Although Modred remains a constantly evil character throughout the Idylls, Percivale and Gawain's personalities become distinguishable only after Tennyson shows them in different situations in different idylls. Tennyson assigns definite functions to his major and minor characters. Most of the time a close study of the minor characters' functions is of greatest significance to the idyll's over-all meaning for the entire work.

The idealistic male builders of Arthur's kingdom divide into two classes: Gareth, Pelleas, and Arthur—the major characters—and Percivale, Bors, and Galahad, the minor characters. In the chapter preceding "Gareth and Lynette," Arthur's knights swear by strict rules of excellence. The Gareth story shows the extent to which Arthur's vows can inspire a person and what excellence of character results from obedience to the Knightly Code. In the Gareth idyll, the hero gracefully undergoes harassment and hard battles in proving he is a good knight. Although other people like Sir Kay and Lynette rebuke his adamant adherence to Arthur's high code, Gareth cares only about being as perfect a knight as possible. For the entire Idylls, Gareth represents a high standard of excellence to which other knights in the succeeding idylls are compared. Gareth represents Camelot in its highest moment. The King's ideals greatly inspire this
young man, and Gareth in turn proves to the King how well his ideals can work.

Gareth is the youngest son of Bellicent and Lot, brother of Gawain and Mordred, and nephew to the King. He lives at home with what he considers an overly protective mother, "Prison'd, and kept and coax'd and whistled to-- / Since the good mother holds me still a child" (G&L, ll. 14-5), and a father who "... beside the hearth / Lies like a dog, and all but smoulder'd out ... / A yet warm corpse, and yet unburiable." (G&L, ll. 74-5). Gareth dreams of joining his brothers and being a knight in Arthur's hall. There he can right the wrong of the world:

Man am I grown, a man's work must I do.  
Follow the deer: follow the Christ, the King,  
Live pure, speak true, right wrong, follow the King--  
Else, wherefore born? (G&L ll. 115-8)

Brimming with youthful idealism and feeling stifled at home, he compares himself to a caged bird and recites an allegorical tale of Fame and Shame to Bellicent. His incessant pleadings finally convince her to

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20 The text of the poem used for this thesis is that of the Random House edition, The Poems and Plays of Tennyson (Toronto, 1938).

21 The following abbreviations will be used for this thesis:

CA - "The Coming of Arthur"  
GL - "Gareth and Lynette"  
MG - "The Marriage of Geraint"  
GE - "Geraint and Enid"  
BB - "Balin and Bale"  
MV - "Merlin and Vivien"  
LE - "Lancelot and Elaine"  
HG - "The Holy Grail"  
PE - "Pelles and Estarrre"  
LT - "The Last Tournament"  
G - "Guinevere"  
PA - "The Passing of Arthur"
let him ride off to Camelot. Bellicent, wishing to keep him home as company for her, yet not wishing to displease him, reluctantly gives her permission with the stipulation that he must disguise himself as a kitchen scullion for a year. In this time he is to prove himself, but Bellicent hopes her son will become discouraged and return quickly to her.

Gareth plays a kitchen-knave as easily as he played the knight at home. He drinks in the atmosphere and becomes more intoxicated with Camelot listening to the tales of his heroes, Arthur and Lancelot. His mother releases him from his promise after a month, and he tells Arthur who he is. Gareth asks for a quest, proudly asserting he needs no name to help him. He says, "Let be my name until I make my name! / My deeds will speak . . . " (G&L, 11. 562-3) He believes in himself. However, Lynette, the major female character of the idyll, does not. She comes to Arthur for help, for villain knights hold her sister captive. Lynette wants Lancelot or another courageous knight for her quest, but Arthur assigns Gareth to her. She sees only an eager kitchen boy hoping to do the job of a man.

On his quest, Gareth listens to Lynette’s incessant rebukes:

"Thou smellest all of kitchen grease," (G&L, 1. 733) "Dish washer and broach - turner, loon!" (G&L, 1. 751) "Thou art not knight but knave," (G&L, 1, 920) and " . . . Insolent scullion . . . " (G&L, 1. 952) --yet he remains calm with her while excited at the possibility of proving himself. Even though Lynette thinks he is a kitchen scullion, he practices knightly virtues. Gareth wins his quest against the Knights of Day, Night, and Death, and weds either Lyonors or Lynette, depending on which
version of the story one wants to believe. However, the reader sees
Gareth's victory as less than perfect: his triumph over the horrible
Black Knight of Death is only a victory over a young boy, and Tennyson
does not even take the time to discuss what happens to Gareth. Tennyson
dismisses Gareth without telling whom he marries, indicating the unimpor-
tance of this young knight's victory in relation to the action of the
entire Idylls.

In Malory's story, Gareth is not as idealistic. Tennyson retains
the essential story of a disguised knight (Gareth calls himself Sir Beau-
mains) working in Arthur's kitchen. He battles the Red Knight and others
for the Lady Linet, who constantly reviles him. He falls in love with
Dame Liones, but each time they plan to consummate their love, the jeal-
ous Linet sends a knight to wound Gareth somehow. Gareth wins a tourna-
ment as Liones' champion aided by a magic ring of virtue she gives him,
and they finally wed. However, he meets a tragic death. Arthur requests
Gareth and his brother Sir Gaberis to bring Guenever to the fire to be
punished for adultery. However, Lancelot accidentally slays the two
brothers.

Tennyson makes his Gareth very idealistic, but otherwise he is
essentially the same as Malory's character. Tennyson deletes from his
version the story of Gareth's love for Lyonors, because this part of the
story is not important to Gareth's function in the Idylls. Gareth is
fully assured of his capabilities, and all goes well for him in Camelot.
The whole tone of youthful optimism, Tennyson's addition, shows that
Tennyson wants to stress Camelot's hopeful atmosphere in its beginning.
The author makes a contrast between two youthful idealists, Gareth and Pelleas. It is important to note the placement of the two idylls to understand the difference between the two young knights. Because Gareth's idealism finds an outlet in Camelot's hopeful beginning months, the Gareth book is first in "The Round Table". Pelleas' idealism is destroyed in the depressing aftermath of the Holy Grail Quest, and Pelleas is the last knight Tennyson describes in a full idyll. All of Gareth's dreams become realities. He weds a beautiful maiden in the end to live happily ever after. Pelleas too dreams, and his dreams seem to come true when he wins his first tournament. He is in love with love--"... he loved all maiden, but no maid, / In special, half-awake he whisper'd, 'Where? / 0 where? I love thee, tho' I know thee not... ',' (P&E, ll. 39-41) and he finds a beautiful maiden to love. However, he desires a maid as pure as Guinevere so he can be her Arthur, and he finds just that type of maid: an unchaste woman rejecting a good man loving her. When Pelleas first sees Ettarre, "The beauty of her flesh adash'd the boy." (P&E, l. 174) He does not admire her beautiful soul as an idealistic lover should, as much as he admires her beautiful body. But Pelleas does "... lend / All the young beauty of his own soul to hers." (P&E, ll. 78-9) He is so captivated with his "fair lady" that he totally blinds himself to her true character. He acts like a pathetic fool. Ettarre bites him, locks him out of her castle, sends her three knights to kill him, calls him "Sir Baby," and has him bound and thrown out of her castle. She regards him as "... a dog before his master's door / Kick'd, he returns..." (P&E, ll. 255-6) But Pelleas, like Gareth,
wants to remain a gentlemanly knight, so he ignores the scorn of the lady and remains very attentive and patient.

Pelleas does not realize the extent of his foolishness until he finds Ettarre sleeping with Gawain, the messenger sent to persuade Ettarre to love Pelleas. Instead of being temporarily chagrined and learning from his mistake, Pelleas flies into a terrible rage and continues to harbor bitterness. He might have returned to normal except for Percivale; but Pelleas is like a person "Who gets a wound in battle, and the sword / That made it plunges thro' the wound again, / And pricks it deeper . . . " (P&E, 11. 518-20) Pelleas wakes from a nightmare only to hear from Percivale that Guinevere is not true. The young knight becomes wild and accuses everyone of being untrue, even the King. He leaps on his horse and flees, running over a beggar. He meets Lancelot, who asks his name, to which Pelleas replies, "I am wrath and shame and hate and evil fame." (P&E, 1. 556) Pelleas rides to Camelot, as if he wants one last chance to prove to himself that some good remains in Arthur's kingdom. But Arthur is not present, and Guinevere is there with Lancelot. She senses that something is wrong, and she kindly tries to find out what is troubling Pelleas. As she speaks, Pelleas, incensed with hypocrisy, looks at her with " . . . an eye so fierce / She quail'd . . . " (P&E, 11. 589-90) He hisses at her and runs from the room.

In the Idylls Pelleas represents the young idealist, who, unlike Gareth, sees his hopes shattered. Jerome Buckley puts it well, "Yet whereas Gareth proved the validity of his confident idealism, Pelleas
must learn the reality of evil." The reason Pelleas' dreams are shattered shows his function as a character in the total work. Pelleas comes to Camelot after the destructive Holy Grail Quest but he knows nothing of how Arthur's kingdom is weakening. Pelleas only knows that he wants to be a good knight and to love a pure maiden. But the atmosphere in Camelot is not conducive to this type of youthful idealism. Arthur's ideals no longer have a strong influence on his people, and the strain of trying to be something they cannot has proven by this time destructive to Arthur's knights and, thus, to the kingdom. Where all the knights except Sir Kay respect and share Gareth's optimism, the knights scorn Pelleas' youthful idealism. Pelleas represents the extent to which Camelot has weakened since the time of Gareth's fresh hopeful arrival in Camelot.

In the "Pelleas and Etgarre" idyll, Pelleas represents someone who still believes in Arthur's goals. The minor characters of this idyll--Gawain, Percivale, Lancelot, and Guinevere--have all fallen away from the King's ideals; Gawain and Percivale both violate their knightly vows, and Lancelot and Guinevere's love is well known and marked by her jealousy. Etgarre, the other major character, is basically evil. Everyone works against the young idealist, and Pelleas, too weak to fight everyone, falls victim to Camelot's destructive influence. As William Brashear correctly suggests, Pelleas becomes the Red Knight . . . who builds his Kingdom in the North opposed to Arthur's and who challenges

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the King in such bitter terms. As the Red Knight speaks, "... Arthur [knows] the voice; the face." (LT, 1. 456) The young idealist, so bitterly disappointed in the hollowness of his highly revered knightly vows decides to represent something real, not ideal. Pelleas tells Arthur his people of the North profess "To be none other than themselves ... ," (LT, 1. 83) making them much more honorable than the hypocrites of Arthur's court.

Tennyson compares Gareth and Pelleas at first to the older idealist, King Arthur. Arthur is an idealist as well as an ideal person. Although Tennyson never directly tells the reader that Arthur is an emissary from God, the people of Camelot think he is. The birth of Arthur is so shrouded in mystery and the supernatural that the people of Camelot assume Arthur is not from this world. However, Tennyson is intentionally vague at this point, so that Arthur's birth can be naturally or supernaturally explained. Uther supposedly fathered Arthur. On the night of Uther's death, Arthur rides in on a wave of flame to Merlin's feet, while a tempest rages in nature. Although Tennyson never states that Merlin uses magic to produce an heir from the sonless Uther, Arthur's subjects describe their king as: "... a phantom king," (CA, 1. 429) "The king ... / From Fairyland ... ," (G&L, 11. 242-3) a king who "... dropt from heaven," (CA, 1. 182) and "... This king is fair / Beyond the race of Britons and of men." (CA, 11. 329-30) Clearly Arthur, out

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of the realm of ordinary men is born or produced to fulfill a special mission in Camelot, and that mission is to rule the wastelands in a civilized manner.

The way Arthur chooses to rule his people shows he is an idealist. Arthur is faced with a formidable chore. Wanting to believe in him, many people, like the young novice in the convent, accept Arthur as their king. They are content not to question Arthur's origin, for Merlin said, "... his grave should be a mystery / From all men, like his birth ..." (G, ll. 295-6) However, some question Arthur's right to rule them because of his mysterious birth. Most of these people envy him: "A doubt that ever smoulder'd in the hearts / Of those great lords and barons of his realm... / ... Who is he / That he should rule us?" (CA, ll. 64-5, 67-8) Some people, e.g. Tristram, want to rationalize why they should not follow his leadership. To civilize a people from a land "Where the beast was ever more and more / But man was ever less and less, till Arthur came," (CA, ll. 11-2) requires a set of stringent rules. Arthur chooses to set up his rules as moral standards for ideal behavior, and he is an example his subjects should follow. As a knight and ruler, Arthur feels, "... that life of mine / I guard as God's high gift from scathe and wrong." (G, ll. 490-1)

He chooses to work his ways through the Round Table:

... Then the King in low deep tones,
And simple words of great authority,
Bound them by so strait vows to his own self
That when they rose, knighted from kneeling, some
Were pale as at the passing of a ghost,
Some flush'd, and others dazed, as one who wakes
Half-blinded at the coming of a light. (CA, ll. 260-6)
Arthur is the light coming into the lives of the beast-like men. He binds his knights to vows of: "... utter hardihood, utter gentleness / And, loving, utter faithfulness in love, / And uttermost obedience to the King." (G&L, ll. 542-4)\(^{24}\) His knights become "A glorious company, the flower of men, / To serve as model for the mighty world." (G, ll. 460-1) As the idealist, Arthur attempts to work his will with pure values on a pagan world. He fails because, as Professor Rayls states, "The vision and the potential were there, but the means of externalizing the vision was lacking."\(^{25}\) Earthly men cannot live by the same code of behavior as one guided by "... Powers who walk the world." (CA, l. 106)

The question arises as to whether Arthur expects too much from his knights, causing them to be unable to follow their vows. The people of the wasteland beg Arthur, "... Arise, and help us thou! / For here between the man and beast we die." (CA, ll. 44-5) Arthur chooses to civilize his people by asking them to follow a set of rules appealing to their highest natures. Arthur demands no more of his people than he demands of himself in living by these highly moral standards. But Arthur, as a Christ-like figure, is obviously more nearly capable of perfection than the beast-like men of the wastelands. Arthur is unrealistic in his appraisal of how much his people are capable of reforming. The Knightly

\(^{24}\)Arthur gives the full Knightly Code in "Guinevere" ll. 460-80.

Code is extremely idealistic, and Arthur asks of his knights only to follow this code as much as they can individually. Yet, swearing in unison to follow Arthur and his ideals puts a terrific pressure on the knights to live nearly perfectly, keeping the unity of the Round Table. Arthur's technique of setting group goals, then stressing the knight's individuality in following these goals is a masterful plan. However, it fails, and the failure results from Arthur's unrealistic goals. Arthur demands more than his knights are capable of giving over a sustained period of time.

As the idealist who is a ruler, Arthur tries to impart his values to his people. Because he is an idealist, he tries to be a perfect husband. Guinevere never complains to Arthur that she is unhappy, although she does complain to her lover Lancelot. Guinevere wrongly interprets Arthur's austere behavior to mean he does not love her:

Arthur my lord, Arthur, the faultless King,
That passionate perfection, my good Lord—
But who can gaze upon the sun in heaven:
He never spake word of reproach to me,
He never had a glimpse of mine untruth,
He cares not for me...! (L&E, 11. 121-6)

Guinevere believes she can only love and be loved by someone full of passion. She tells Lancelot, "For who loves me must have a touch of earth." (L&E, 1. 133) She feels Arthur to be devoid of passion. She fails to see that he expresses his love for her in a different way than Lancelot. However, she is justified in feeling that her husband's behavior at times precludes warmth. The reader never sees Arthur and Guinevere even talking until the "Lancelot and Elaine" idyll, and at
this point the marriage is unsuccessful from Guinevere's viewpoint. During the beginning months of their marriage, Arthur is definitely more interested in his knights than his wife. Tennyson subtly lets the reader know this by emphasizing Arthur's contact with his knights and omitting any mention of Arthur with his wife. When Arthur finally lets her know of his deep feelings for her, it is much too late.

Arthur suspects Guinevere's infidelity before he finally talks to her in the convent, "... and the King / Glanced first at him, then her, and went his way." (I&E, ll. 94-5) Likewise, he is not so idealistic as to blind himself to the evil around him. Until "The Holy Grail," he hopes his knights are as intense in their idealism as when they first took their knightly vows. Arthur wants them so much to embody his ideals. Initially, his pride in them keeps him from believing they are not living up to his standards, "No keener hunter after glory breathes. / He loves it in his knights more than himself; / They prove to him his work ..." (I&E, ll. 155-7) More importantly though, Arthur sees the good in his knights because that is what he looks for. Other people see the knights falling from their vows because that is what they want to see. As Merlin thinks to himself after Vivien rants at length about the hypocrisy of Arthur and his knights:

O true and tender! O my liege and King!
O selfless man and stainless gentleman,
Who wouldst against thy own eye witness fain
Have all men true and leal, all women pure!
How, in the mouths of base interpreters,
From over-fineness not intelligible
To things with every sense as false and foul
As the poach'd filth that floods the middle streets,
Is thy white blameless accounted blame! (M&V, ll. 789-97)
Several incidents show Arthur painfully facing up to his failures. He refuses to go on the Holy Grail Quest, knowing it is a search for tangible proof that spiritual things exist. If his knights still believed in their vows, the Quest would not be necessary. The King feels the Grail is "A sign to maim this Order which I made," (HG, l. 297) and as his knights ride out of Camelot, "... the King himself could hardly speak / For grief ..." (HG, ll. 354-5) Then in "The Last Tournament," Arthur questions Lancelot asking if all is well or if he only imagines "... the glance / That only seems half-loyal to command - / A manner somewhat fallen from reverence - ." (LT, ll. 117-9) Everybody's actions seem to confirm Arthur's worst suspicions that his kingdom is rapidly decaying.

In characterizing Arthur, Tennyson is faced with the problem of just how far he should carry the Christ parallel. If Arthur is too Christ-like, the story loses credibility. Therefore, Tennyson presents Arthur as a nearly perfect man having some humanizing qualities. He loves a good battle, and one fair day, feeling very youthful, he rides off to fight anyone. In jousts, he laughs if one of his knights knocks him from his horse, but once in real battle, he is filled with the desire to win. Even though he seldom frowns, he is furious with Lancelot when the latter disguises himself in the Diamond Tournament without Arthur's knowledge. The sincerity of Arthur's love for Guinevere is probably his most humanizing quality.26 Even though Arthur does not

show his love for Guinevere in a way she likes, he loves her deeply. With Guinevere, he hopes to set an example for his subjects. Although disappointed because she represents another failure in establishing an ideal kingdom, the King is thoroughly shaken in the abbey knowing he will never see his wife again. With a voice "Monotonous and hollow like a ghost's / Denouncing judgment, but tho' changed . . . ," (G, ll. 417-8) he comes to see Guinevere for a final time. As a husband deceived by his wife and best friend, Arthur at first berates her for hurting him and bringing on his kingdom's destruction. But then he looks at her groveling at his feet on the floor and sadly asks, "But how to take last leave of all I loved?" (G, l. 543) He tells her before he leaves, "Let no man dream but that I love thee still." (G, l. 557) He finally realizes how he has failed Guinevere, but this knowledge comes too late to make a marriage except "Hereafter in that world where all are pure." (G, l. 560)

"Tennyson's last change in his text, made not long before his death, was the addition to the epilogue of the line 'Ideal manhood closed in real man,'"27 writes Jerome Buckley. The author wants to show Arthur as a man as well as an ideal figure. This poignant example of the King's feelings as a forlorn husband show him as a real man. However, Tennyson even qualifies Arthur's deep love for Guinevere, for Arthur tells Guinevere of his love for her at the very end of the Idylls. Until this point, they have very little dialogue, and he has not revealed his deep love for her, even though he has loved her deeply throughout their marriage. So

27 Buckley, Tennyson, The Growth of a Poet, p. 175.
the author's attempt to portray Arthur as a real man is undermined by the fact that Arthur is a real husband to Guinevere the last time they ever see each other.

The departures Tennyson makes from Malory clearly show the qualities the author wants to stress in Arthur. "For in Tennyson's work, Arthur attains a stature and a central position far beyond that in any of its medieval sources," says William Brashear. "Arthur is not only the strongest knight but he sustains the realm in his own vision." In Malory, Arthur is not infallible as a warrior or husband. He is a lusty lover, a fact Tennyson deletes because it is not suitable for his Christ-like characterization of Arthur. Arthur fathers two sons, neither by Guenever. One son in Borre, born of Lionors. The other son is Mordred, born of an incestuous relationship between Arthur and his sister Margawse. Merlin prophesizes that Arthur will die because of this act. Tennyson's Arthur does not acknowledge any relationship to Dored, "... the man they call / My sister's son - no kin of mine ..." (G, 11. 569-70) In the 1859 edition of "Guinevere," Tennyson has Arthur speak of Modred as his nephew; but in the later editions he feels it necessary to have Arthur deny all kinship.29

As a warrior in Malory's story, Arthur has the advantage of the magic scabbard the Lady of the Lake gives him. If Arthur has his scabbard with him, nobody can wound him. The Lady of the Lake also

28 Brashear, op. cit., p. 39.
29 Buckley, op. cit., p. 176.
gives Arthur the magic sword Excalibur. Malory makes other knights stronger than King Arthur. Pelinore takes Arthur's horse by force to follow the questing beast. Tristram "gave him such a buffet upon the helm with his sword that King Arthur had no power to keep in his saddle." Also, Bors de Ganis is ready to kill Arthur, but Launcelot restrains him.

As a husband Malory's Arthur is hardly ideal. He tells Merlin in the same breath that he loves Guenever for her beauty and that her father has the Round Table his father Uther used to have. Merlin tells Arthur that "Guenever was not wholesome for him to take to wife, for he warned him that Launcelot should love her, and she him again." Yet Arthur marries her for her dowry of a hundred knights as well as for her loveliness. The biggest disappointment in Arthur's life is not that his wife commits adultery, for he knows she will, but that he has to sentence her to death by fire because she is caught. This means to Arthur, "Now I am sure the noble fellowship of the Round Table is broken for ever," for he knows Launcelot, his friends, and kin will try to save her, thus splitting the Round Table into two camps. Arthur laments, "... and much more I am sorrier for my good knight's loss than for the loss of my fair queen; for queens I might have enow, but such a fellowship of good knights shall never be together in no company." Malory's Arthur is a lusty warrior loving best his knights and his Round Table. As a

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husband he is less than attentive.

A study of how Arthur functions in the Idylls shows why Tennyson changes Malory's Arthur to make an idealized warrior for his work. Tennyson's Arthur is an idealist wanting to establish an ideal kingdom. Each time Arthur appears in an idyll, the major character either challenges or reinforces the King's idealism. Although Arthur appears throughout the Idylls, he is hardly even a major character. "The Coming of Arthur" tells about Arthur's birth, his marriage, and his founding of the Round Table. Even though the idyll is about Arthur, he never speaks a word, although Tennyson gives Arthur's thoughts (CA, ll. 77-93). Leodogram, Bedivere, and Bellicent narrate the idyll, and their narration makes Arthur a distant figure; this foreshadows that Arthur throughout the Idylls will be a figure in the background apart from the mainstream of life in Camelot. The tale of Gareth in "Gareth and Lynette" is the story of a young idealistic knight whom Arthur inspires. This idyll is the most optimistic of all the idylls, and just as Gareth can win his quest, Arthur can rule effectively. All is going well for the King in this idyll, for knights with clean honor shining like stars surround him; he benevolently grants requests to his people; and he is stronger than the evil forces around him, Sir Kay and King Mark. The setting for over half this idyll is Arthur's hall, and Arthur is clearly the dominating force in the Gareth story.

While Gareth proves to Arthur the strength of the Knightly Code, Arthur sits in his hall ruling benevolently. But in the Beraint books, the action shifts away from Camelot. The wasteland outside Camelot is
the main setting for the next two idylls, and Arthur appears as a minor character at the end of the "Geraint and Enid" idyll. One of Arthur's chief knights, Geraint, has gone from the court and fallen from his vows. Already in the second book of "The Round Table," one of Arthur's best knights does not follow his vows. Although this is an ominous sign, Arthur adamantly adheres to his beliefs and insists the evil Edyrn has reformed (G&E, ll. 896-918), but the King is becoming less influential with his people. Arthur functions as the source of idealism, but he elevates only one person, Edyrn. Tennyson qualifies this reform by having Enid doubt her cousin Edyrn's sincerity. Also, Enid, not the King, helps Geraint regain his knightly valor.

Balin is the third knight Arthur inspires. However, Arthur's influence as king is rapidly vanishing, for Balin regresses to his madness and kills his brother. Though Tennyson shows signs of Arthur's humanness in this idyll, ll. 15-25, Arthur does not have enough of the right kind of human contact with his knights to help them retain their vows. As a minor character in this idyll, Arthur still functions as the idealist, although he no longer inspires all his knights. Balin chooses Lancelot as his model, not the King.

Arthur is a minor character in the "Lancelot and Elaine" and "Holy Grail" idylls. The former idyll concentrates on Lancelot and the cause of his weakness: his inability to break off his affair with Guinevere. This idyll shows King Arthur's major weakness, too: his inability to act at the appropriate time when he suspects Lancelot and Guinevere are lovers. Arthur's function in this idyll is to underscore
Lancelot's inability to act, when action for both men could improve the faltering Round Table. If the chief knight and the king fail to act at the appropriate time, then disaster is imminent. The disaster that follows is the Holy Grail Quest. Arthur is away from the daily life in Camelot, and his absence causes the knights to swear to follow a phantom vision. After this idyll, Arthur becomes more and more realistic about his knights' adherence to their vows, and he acts as a realistic commentator on the Quest when the knights return.

In "The Last Tournament" there are two plots centering on Tristram and Arthur. The action of one reinforces the action of the other. The plot of Tristram, the fallen knight, parallels the plot of Arthur, the fallen King. As Tristram is breaking the rules to win the last tournament, Arthur's young knights are sliming themselves in a bloody victory over the Red Knight. The death of chivalry is complete, and symbolically one of the formerly great knights, Tristram, is unchivalrously axed through the head. The fall of his knights is his ruin; Arthur has failed, and the brotherhood and greatness of the Round Table has died in the "... death-dumb autumn-dripping gloom." (LT, 1. 750)

Arthur is a major character in the last two idylls. His function in "Guinevere" is to relay the history and purposes of his Round Table. When it is too late, Guinevere understands the purpose of Arthur's life. Guinevere fails to help Arthur, because she is not fully aware of his high goals. Tennyson deliberately makes Arthur explain in detail his plans at the end of the Idylls, to show that just as Guinevere is not fully aware of the grand purpose of Arthur's life, so most of his
knights are also not aware. Guinevere, as well as the knights, are aware only of vague, high ideals which seem too hard to follow all the time. However, Arthur clarifies the purpose in following them too late. Also, for the first time in the Idylls, Arthur shows deep feelings for his wife. But again it is too late. He tells her how much he loves her, but she wanted Arthur to show her love all the time, not when he was ready to die. Tennyson shows why Arthur fails: his inability to communicate with his subjects and his wife. Throughout the Idylls he is a minor figure in the background not interacting much with his subjects or wife. This lack of communication causes a gap between Arthur and his people, which grows wider with each idyll. Arthur, the idealist, is in the background with his heroic plans, but each idyll progressively shows the distance between Arthur's ideals and the actions of his people.

"The Passing of Arthur" portrays Arthur's realization of how he has failed his people. Tennyson shows Arthur's knights realizing their individual faults through the Idylls: Geraint, Balin, Lancelot, and Percivale. Guinevere finally understands Arthur, and then Arthur at last comprehends why he failed. The King is the last person to realize the cause of Camelot's decay, and when Arthur truly understands what has happened to his kingdom, he is "... but king among the dead." (PA, 1. 72) Arthur understands that he is a major cause of his kingdom's failure, but he cannot rectify the damage. His death is the death of Camelot.

Those knights who are aware become Holy Men: Galahad, Percivale, and Lancelot.
Tennyson's Arthur is the idealized warrior always in the background of the action of his knights. "The Round Table" shows how Arthur and his ideals affect his people. Arthur functions in the Idylls as the source of inspiration. He is above his people, ruling like a benevolent God, but Tennyson shows this quality as a cause of the kingdom's ruin. In Malory Arthur knows his act of incest eventually will cause his death. He is in the background while the main action centers on Lancelot and Tristram. Yet Malory's Arthur is not an idealized warrior: his lust eventually causes his ruin. Tennyson wants to show a Christ-like Arthur whose failure stems from his inability to perceive that his people cannot adhere to high standards of behavior. By making Arthur a distant figure, Tennyson concentrates on how goals of ideal behavior affect a group of people.

Three minor idealistic male figures are counterparts of Arthur. Percivale, Bors, and Galahad represent different aspects of Arthur's personality. Percivale longs for the ideal. He wants to prove to himself and to his sister, who saw the Grail, that he is worthy of seeing the Holy Cup. Percivale tells Ambrosius that he leaves for the Quest full of confidence, thinking "... about all my late-shown prowess in the lists." (HG, l. 362) He is sure "That I should light upon the Holy Grail," (HG, l. 367) for he feels he deserves to see it. However, his confidence abates as he remembers "... the dark warnings of our King, / That most of us would follow wandering fires." (HG, 11. 368-9) Then everything he encounters—the brook, the apples, the woman, the dead baby, the plowman, the milkmaid, the knights in gold, the walled city,
and the old man--turn to dust. Percivale's quest seems futile, for he does not have enough humility. He cries out, "This quest is not for thee." (HG, l. 378) In order to see the Grail, he has to lose himself to save himself; that is, he has to totally lose his pride in order to attain a state of true humility. His doubts of himself finally vanish as he sees the Grail when Galahad ascends to the Spiritual City. Percivale afterwards "... past into the silent life of prayer, / Praise, fast, and alms; and leaving for the cowl / The helmet in an abbey far away / From Camelot..." (HG, ll. 4-7)

Percivale relates the story of the Holy Grail, and for this reason has a very important function as a character. He has the common human fault of pride. Though proud to be a good knight, he tells the story of the Quest in a repentant tone. Looking at the Quest in retrospect, he sees how much he and the other knights need a tangible sign to inspire them. Arthur's ideals no longer fill them with their initial zeal. Percivale tells Ambrosius how the men of the Round Table hope the Quest could prove them better men for their king, although in retrospect Percivale can see the knights are grasping for something that will not be revealed to most of them. The vision of the Holy Cup is only for the purest in spirit. Percivale sees it, and he realizes the wide gap between how pure he thinks he is before the Quest and how much he has to learn about true humility after the Quest. His true repentance for his hubris results in his passing into the Holy Life. As the repentant narrator looking back on the futile Quest, he relates an effective first-hand appraisal of the Quest's worth.
Like Arthur, Percivale doubts his worthiness. "Like Arthur and Lancelot," states William Brashear, "he is harassed by self-doubt, concluding often in near despair." When Arthur finally realizes his kingdom is crumbling around him, doubts about his leadership plague him. The night before his death, he moans, "But in His ways with men I find Him not... / For I, being simple, thought to work his will, / But I have stricken with the sword in vain." (PA, ll. 21-2) How ironic, Tennyson is saying, that often the men coming closest to achieving worthy ideals often doubt their inherent goodness. Percivale becomes a Holy Man, and Arthur introduces his subjects to a civilized way of life.

Bors is the personification of humility, "The highest virtue, mother of them all." (HG, ll. 44-5) He says the Grail quest is "... beyond all hopes of mine / Who scarce had pray'd or ask'd for myself." (HG, ll. 687-8) This knight's shield bears the picture of a pelican (a bird who feeds its young from its own mouth and throat). He is the knight, "A square-set man and honest, and his eyes, / An outdoor sign of all the warmth within." (HG, ll. 700-1) Bors loves above all other men his cousin Lancelot. When his cousin's madness returns to him, he does not want to see the Holy Cup so Lancelot can see it and be healed. Yet Bors, bound and lying in a cell, sees the Grail. Humility and love for Lancelot are two traits Bors and Arthur share. Arthur's humility is apparent as he quietly strives to have men follow him while never asserting his own righteousness.

"The Holy Grail" is the only idyll in which many of Arthur's knights are talking and interacting together. The preceding and following idylls concentrate on one or two characters only. Tennyson brings many men of the Round Table together to show their different personalities, and the Holy Grail Quest then reflects to what degree the individual knights embody Arthur's ideals. Only three knights are pure enough to see the Grail, and these three have an important function in the idyll. The repentant Percivale narrates the idyll. Bors and Galahad are perfect knights, and the futile quests of Lancelot and Gawain reflect Bors and Galahad's goodness. Bors is an honest, humble man. Tennyson portrays him without any faults. He is a much more credible figure than the saintly Galahad. Compared with the other knights in "The Holy Grail" idyll, Bors represents the quiet strength of the Round Table.

When creating the minor idealists in the Idylls of the King, Tennyson must have had in mind lines from the Beatitudes. Percivale hungers and thirsts after righteousness, and he is filled. Bors is the meek inheriting the earth. Galahad is the pure in spirit seeing God. Tennyson characterizes Arthur as saint-like, with some humanizing qualities. But Galahad is the saint pausing only briefly in the world of man, serving, like Arthur, as an example of goodness. Galahad is the youngest man Arthur makes knight, and he is the purest, since he has most recently come from God. William Wordsworth develops this idea in "Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood."
good as thou art beautiful." (HG, l. 135) Everything Tennyson relates about Galahad shows how saintly he is. He is the only person to sit in the Siege Perilous, a chair Merlin makes that "No man could sit but he should lose himself." (HG, l. 174) Even Merlin cannot sit in the chair. Jerome Buckley states, "The Siege Perilous is a chair designed by Merlin to test the character of men; Tennyson said it represented the 'spiritual imagination.'"

Galahad loses himself to God while Merlin accidentally sitting in the chair, loses himself to Vivien. As Galahad sits in the magical chair, the Holy Grail calls him: "I saw the Holy Grail and heard a cry - / O Galahad, and O Galahad, follow me." (HG, ll. 291-2) Galahad with his white armour begins the quest, and he is the only knight pure enough to reach the Spiritual City. Had Arthur chosen to go on the Quest, he would see the cup and go to the heavenly city. Yet, as a man, he has work left on earth and will join Galahad later.

The function of Galahad in "The Holy Grail" is to make Arthur a more credible figure. Until this idyll, Arthur is a very distant, mystical king to whom few of his subjects can relate. But compared to Galahad, Arthur is human, for Galahad has no humanizing qualities. After this idyll, Tennyson shows more of Arthur's emotions. These emotions take on more meaning, since Tennyson has made Arthur a less-distant figure in comparison to the perfect Galahad.

While Tennyson chose to delete many lewd aspects of Malory's characters, he leaves Galahad's character intact. The reason is that

37Buckley, The Poems of Tennyson, p. 536.
Galahad represents pure spiritual goodness, and Tennyson had no reason to give Galahad any more good qualities. In Malory, Galahad is Lancelot's son, a fact Tennyson implies. Like Arthur, Galahad's uncertain origin makes him a more distant, unearthly figure: "... some / Call'd him a son of Lancelot, and some said / Begotten by enchantment ..." (HG, 11, 144-5) Sir Thomas Malory feels, "In his person all chivalry reached its peak," and with his death decay and civil war set in causing the dissolution of Arthur's realm.

The next group of men in Arthur's kingdom are the realists, who see life in Camelot objectively, without any of the romance that the idealists lend to it. The realists want Arthur to succeed, but they perceptively see weaknesses all around them. The major male realists are Geraint, Balin, Lancelot, and Merlin. The minor realistic characters are Dagonet and Sir Bedivere. Geraint, Balin and Lancelot are alike in one respect: each has a flaw in his character making him unable to keep his knightly vows. The respective flaw of each makes him realize why he personally cannot live up to the ideals he respects. Also, this flaw makes him more aware why other men in Camelot cannot follow Arthur's standards.

Geraint serves an important function in the Idylls. The Geraint-Enid story is an obvious contrast to the Arthur-Guinevere story. Arthur, the faithful and unsuspecting husband, and Guinevere, the adulterous wife,

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39 Ibid.
are the antitheses of Enid, the faithful wife, and Geraint, the suspicious husband. Malory does not mention the Geraint and Enid story, although the Welsh Mabinogion and Chrétian de Troyes' French romances of the twelfth century describe Geraint's exploits in detail. Tennyson included the Geraint and Enid story to contrast with Arthur and his Queen. This contrast shows how important a good marriage is in strengthening the best traits in a man. The two Geraint idylls show the decline of a good man. Yet, he marries a wife ideally suited to him, and she saves him from ruin. Arthur's wife, however, ruins him and his kingdom.

Geraint wants most two things: to be a good knight and to have the steadfast love of his wife. Initially he has both. Geraint is the brave Prince of Devon and one of Arthur's most trusted knights. He is courteous and has "... pure nobility of temperament." (MG, l. 212) His massive chest and strong arms make him extremely manly in appearance, yet his lack of manliness causes his fall from his knightly vows. Geraint's flaw is his lack of perceptiveness in judging a situation for its true meaning. As W. David Shaw says of Lynette and Geraint:

Their awareness is so thoroughly concrete and empirical that material objects are the beginning of both their faith and incredulity. The sight of Enid in rags inspires Geraint's sentimental belief in her virtue; then the sound of her words in a dream completely destroys this faith.

Geraint's lack of trust in Enid's faithfulness results from her close

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40 Brashear, op. cit., 39.

association with Guinevere, although ironically Geraint first meets
Enid avenging an insult to the Queen's honor. Fearing that her friend-
ship with Guinevere will cause a taint in Enid's character, Geraint
fawns over Enid so "... if ever yet was wife / True to her lord,
mine shall be so to me." (MG, ll. 47-8) However, his extreme worship
of her causes him to lose his manliness. Despite his wife's assurances,
Geraint is not secure of her affections for him. He overhears fragments
of Enid's speech lamenting her husband's decline to effeminacy and thinks
he finally has proof of her faithlessness. He then devises a series of
ludicrous tests to prove her true character. He makes her dress in rags,
ride before him, and not speak to him under any circumstances. His
jealousy becomes an obsession. Even when Enid saves his life, Geraint
continues to admonish her. As he lay near death because of a severe
wound, he feels she might care for him. However, he pretends he is dead
"That he might prove her to the uttermost / And say to his own heart,
'She weeps for me.'" (G&E, ll. 588-9) This childishness in trying to
hurt someone he feels is hurting him persists until Enid is in real
physical danger from Earl Doorm; then, Geraint saves her. He has been
"Forgetful of his promise to the King ... / Forgetful of his glory
and his name." (MG, ll. 50-54) Chivalrous action seems to snap Geraint
out of his madness, and he apologizes profusely to Enid. He reforms
and again is "... the great prince and man of men." (G&E, l. 960)
His "... fatal quest / Of honor, where no honor can be gain'd (G&E,
ll. 702-3) turns out happily only because of Enid's incredible patience
and devotion. Geraint initially follows his knightly vows because he
respects Arthur and what the King represents. After his near ruin, Geraint follows Arthur's ideals because he realizes how necessary the vows are for sustaining good behavior.

Balin's function in the story is to show how adversely the King's strict code of behavior can affect a basically good man. Balin's character flaw is a different type of madness than Geraint's. Balin wants desperately to serve as Arthur's knight, for he feels the knights' courtesy and gentleness are virtues marking them as good men. Balin has previously served Arthur, but the King banishes him for three years when Balin almost kills a thrall speaking ill of him. Balin continually has to fight his violent temper. These black moods keep him from having the virtues he so respects in Arthur's knights. Yet, Balin is realistic about his weakness, but he sincerely tries to conquer it.

Arthur reaccepts Balin, who desires to prove to the King his worthiness. Balin feels that by trying to embody the knightly virtues, he can show himself deserving of the King's forgiveness and best suppress his madness. Balin seeks an ideal knight to emulate. Reasoning that if he copies a good man, he will have a better chance to repress his savage tendencies, Balin stays close to Lancelot to learn his ways. The double tragedy of Balin is that he wants to follow Arthur's vows, but his volatile disposition and choice of Lancelot as an ideal figure lead to tragedy.

Always feeling that Lancelot's good traits are "... gifts / Born with the blood, not learnable, divine, / Beyond my reach ..." (B&B, ll. 170-2) Balin becomes more and more convinced of Lancelot's
goodness and his own shortcomings. Lancelot becomes an idol incapable of wrong. The more depressed Balin becomes over his lack of goodness, the more he persuades himself he must copy his idol to better himself. One way to do this is to worship the Queen as Lancelot does, for:

... this worship of the queen,
That honor too wherein she holds him - this,
This was the sunshine that hath given the man
A growth, a name that branches o'er the rest,
And strength against all odds . . .
. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
Her likeness would I worship and I might.

(B&B, ll. 175-9, 181)

Balin replaces "... this rough beast upon my shield, / Langued gules, and tooth'd with grinning savagery." (B&B, ll. 192-3) with a likeness of the Queen's crown. He becomes so emotionally dependent upon the appearance of Lancelot and Guinevere's goodness that it takes little to shatter Balin's illusion and bring on his madness. The reader, ironically, sees Lancelot and Guinevere having a tete-a-tete first through Balin's eyes. Balin does not want to believe that everything he worships as good is only an illusion, and so he flees to the woods to calm himself. However, he meets Garlon and Vivien, who only reinforce his suspicions of Lancelot and Guinevere's affair. Balin cannot endure the reality of Lancelot and Guinevere's love. His example of goodness is false, and "... his evil spirit upon him leapt." (B&B, 1. 529) He savagely defaces the Queen's symbol on his shield. His brother Balan is nearby and thinks some knight "... tramples on the goodly shield to show / His loathing of our Order and the Queen" (B&B, ll. 541-2) which is ironically true. Balan fights Balin for Guinevere's honor, and they, upon recognition, die in each other's arms.
Balin's flaws are his lack of perceptiveness (like Geraint), his excessive desire to believe, and his need for emotional security. Yet he strives "To learn the graces of their Table [and] fought / Hard with himself . . ." (B&B, ll. 233-4) For trying to live up to his best potential, Balin is not a bad knight. He is truer to Arthur by really trying, but failing, to live up to his vows than those knights hypocritically bearing Arthur's standards.

How Tennyson changes Balin from Le Morte D'Arthur is noteworthy in two ways. In Malory, Balin and Balan are good knights fighting with Arthur against King Lot. They do fight each other and die, but, as William Brashear points out, on the whole, "The savage Balin is a character of Tennyson's own devising, the Balin and Balan episode in Malory being rather slight and hardly suggesting the use Tennyson makes of it. 42 Tennyson makes his character a combination of the most dominant personality traits in Arthur's men. Significantly, the "Balin and Balan" idyll is the last one Tennyson wrote, and the author summed up his male characterizations in Balin. Like Gareth, Balin wants to be one of Arthur's knights so he can practice knightly virtues. Like Pelleas, he builds his illusion of the ideal around a false idol and becomes mad when his idol fails him. Like Arthur, he worships the Queen and wants her to serve as a symbol of goodness, not realizing her love for Lancelot. Like Percivale, he strives to prove himself worthy of being

42 William Brashear, "Tennyson's Tragic Vitalism: Idylls of the King," Victorian Poetry, VI (Spring 1968), 42.
Arthur's knight, because he feels his own weaknesses. Like Bors, he is humble; and he worships Lancelot unrealistically. Like Merlin, Vivien deceives him and causes his death. Like Dagonet, Arthur refines his churlish behavior. Like Geraint, he overly stresses the appearance of a situation. Like Lancelot, madness afflicts him. Like Gawain, his initially good intentions never turn out right. And, finally, like Tristram, he is a man of the woods, whose beast-like tendencies win out over his knightly vows.

The second notable feature of Balin's character is that Tennyson makes Balin his direct counterpart, so that together they represent a "double-self". In his article "The Contraries" Allan Danzig states that there are two selves, the contrary and negation, which exists in constant dialectical tension but don't destroy each other. Men must learn to recognize and accept their mutual existence and give each its due until he achieves a balanced harmony. In the Idylls of the King, sometimes the two selves are developed as contrary pairs of characters, such as Balin and Balan. Balan acts as Balin's conscience. Balin recognizes his brother as his better and depends on him for emotional guidance. When Balin and Balan are together in Arthur's kingdom, Balin's madness does not trouble him. Once Balin is away from his

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43 Clyde de L. Ryals, From the Great Deep, p. 186.
45 Even the names, different by only one letter, suggest the sameness of the characters.
conscience, he cannot sustain rational behavior alone. Totally out of control, he accidentally kills his conscience Balan, and they die together as they were born together.

The third male character aware of the need for ideals but unable to live up to them is Lancelot. Lancelot plays an important function in the _Idylls_, for he embodies nearly all Arthur's knightly virtues. Lancelot is Arthur's standard bearer, "... the chief of knights," (I&E, l. 140) and an example for other knights. In physical appearance, he has black hair, contrasting to Arthur's golden hair, mighty hands, an ancient scar on his cheek, and a deep bronzed tan. He carries a blue shield covered with fearless lions. Humbleness is one of his dominant personality traits, "... and in me there dwells / No greatness, save it be some far-off greatness to know well I am not great." (I&E, ll. 447-9) Of manners, Lancelot has the noblest. He is courteous, "Full courtly, yet not falsely." (I&E, l. 235) For example, he comes to Elaine's defense when her brothers tease her, and in jousts he strikes down the older, practiced knights, letting the younger ones go by so they can make a name for themselves. In Malory, after Launcelot's death, Sir Ector gives an eulogy which is a comprehensive overview of Malory and Tennyson's Lancelot:

And thou were the courteous knight that ever bare shield. And thou were the truest friend to thy lover that ever bestrad horse. And thou were the truest love of a sinful man that ever loved woman. And thou were the kindest man that ever struck with sword. And thou were the goodliest person that ever came among press of knights. And thou were the meekest man and the gentlest that ever ate in hall among ladies. And thou were the sternest knight to thy mortal foe that ever put spear to rest.46

46 Malory, op. cit., p. 425.
Lancelot is the most noble of Arthur's knights, and he epitomizes all the knightly virtues except one, chastity. Knowing the example he should set for Arthur's Order, Lancelot is constantly overwhelmed by his sense of hypocrisy:

... what profits me my name
Of greatest knight? I fought for it, and have it.
Pleasure to have it, none; to lose it, pain;
Now grown a part of me; but what use is it?
To make men worse by making my sin known?
Or sin seems less, the sinner seeming great?
Alas for Arthur's greatest knight, a man
Not after Arthur's heart... (I&E, ll. 1402-9)

His guilt reaches a point where severe melancholy causes temporary madness: "His mood was often like a fiend, and rose / And drove him into wastes and solitudes / For agony, who was yet a living soul." (I&E, ll. 250-2) Tennyson shows his madness afflicting him on the Grail Quest, for he thinks little men are beating him. In Malory, he is mad for two years and calls himself Le Chevaler Mal Pet: the knight that hath trespassed. Tennyson does not include this incident, for he does not want to give Lancelot an excuse for loving Guinevere. Lancelot's madness is not justification for his love of the Queen. His guilt love mentally and physically affects him: "The great and guilty love he bare the Queen, / In battle with the love he bare his lord, / Had marr'd his face, and mark'd it ere his time." (I&E, ll. 244-6)

He is a nearly ideal man ruined by his love for Guinevere. As Paul F. Baum states, "Lancelot's greatness is limited by circumstances: this is the true tragedy of Tennyson's subjects: man destroyed by
Lancelot knows this relationship with the Queen is wrong, but he is too weak to terminate the intimacy. His love dominates him, and Guinevere dominates him. His heart is "Love-loyal to the least wish of the Queen." (I&E, l. 89) He lies to Arthur about going to the Diamond Tournament, because he thinks Guinevere's look says, "Stay with me, I am sick, my love is more / Than many diamonds . . . " (I&E, ll. 87-8) He never becomes angry at Guinevere, even when she jealously chastises him for his supposed love for Elaine. When Lancelot realizes their love is waning, he seeks to break "These bonds that so defame me. Not without / She will it--would I, if she will'd it? nay, / Who knows?" (I&E, ll. 1410-2) Because of his guilty love for the Queen, he does not see the Holy Grail, which, as Mr. Ryals rightly concludes, " . . . was sought as a compensation for his dependency on Guinevere."\(^4\) By the time of the last tournament, when Arthur's laws and vows are being flagrantly dis-obeyed, Lancelot is powerless to stop the mockery made of the tournament. And finally because of his love for Guinevere, he denies himself the pure love of Elaine,\(^5\) the lily maid of Astolat:

He loved her with all the love except the love
Of man and woman when they love their best,
Closest and sweetest, and had died the death
In any knightly fashion for her sake. (I&E, ll. 863-6)

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\(^5\)Ryals, op. cit., p. 81.

\(^6\)However, in a 1860 review of the Idylls in Godney's, Elaine is called a "Forward hussy".
Lancelot's platonic love for Elaine is ironically the type of love that Arthur hopes his chief knight will exemplify for the other knights. Arthur tells Lancelot, "... and thee, a man / Made to be loved ..." (I&E, ll. 1352-3) But for Lancelot, "The shackles of an old love straiten'd him, / His honor rooted in dishonor stood, / and faith unfaithful kept him falsely true." (I&E, ll. 870-3)

Through Lancelot's deeds and sufferings, Tennyson characterizes a real man. Lancelot is the most life-like character in the Idylls, and the one with whom most readers sympathize. Lancelot is the person recognizing Gareth's nobility and berating Sir Kay for not seeing it. Arthur's chief knight then follows Gareth to be a help if needed, in the quest. Lancelot tries to discourage Elaine's love for him, saying her love is only a youthful crush. Yet he half wishes he could return her love, because he recognizes, "Ye loved me damsel, surely with a love / Far tenderer than my Queen's ..." (I&E, ll. 1363-4) Lancelot is the knight recognizing in Pelleas the fall of Arthur's knights, and how much he personally has been a contributing cause, "Rise, weakling; I am Lancelot, say they say." (P&E, l. 570) Lancelot cannot answer the King when asked to judge the last tournament, knowing what kind of a judge of other men's actions he would be, "Speak, Lancelot, thou art silent; is it well?" (LT, l. 107) Yet Lancelot dies a Holy Man. William Bra-shear concludes the portrait of Lancelot:

Lancelot is not far below Arthur, and Tennyson treats him with the greatest sympathy. He is "human, all too human;" and it is in his imperfection that Guinevere finds him warmer and more attractive than Arthur. His is the sharpest sense of guilt and responsibility
because he most nearly comprehends what he betrays and Arthur's true greatness. 50

Although Tennyson retains Lancelot's character from Malory nearly intact, Tennyson treats Lancelot differently than Malory. Lancelot is important to the action of six idylls. His decline as Arthur's chief knight reflects the slow decay of Arthur's kingdom. Lancelot is mentioned in "The Coming of Arthur," but he first appears as a speaking minor character in "Gareth and Lynette". Gareth is the young knight believing in Arthur's Order and the positive value of knightly chivalry. Lancelot, the experienced older knight, shows how perfectly Arthur's ideals work. Lancelot is like a kindly brother to Gareth. Lancelot follows Gareth on a quest inspired by Gareth's youthful idealism, and the older knight stays in the background to be of help. Lancelot is the perfect picture of courtesy. Five idylls later, Lancelot is a major character in the Lancelot and Elaine story. In this idyll, Tennyson develops Lancelot as a character most fully, and Tennyson shows through the decline of the chief knight, the weakening of the Round Table. Lancelot wins the Diamond Tournament and practices perfect courtesy toward Elaine, but this victory and courtesy are based on lies. Lancelot disguises himself in the tournament, because he originally thinks Guinevere does not want him to attend. However, he misreads her look, and he has to justify his refusal to ride with Arthur. Lancelot battles for Elaine and treats her with every courtesy. However, this exemplary behavior is based on his loyalty to his lover, "His honor rooted in dishonor stood." (L&E, l. 871) Lancelot in this idyll shows how the
appearance of perfect knightly behavior is only a veneer covering frustrations and adultery.

Lancelot is a minor character in the next four idylls, and other men are now following his decline. If the chief knight falls from his vows, lesser men either rationalize their own failures with Lancelot's failures, or they stop trying to follow their vows, reasoning that if Lancelot cannot follow the vows, why should they even try. "The Holy Grail" idylls show the mental effect of Lancelot's hypocrisy, since Lancelot does not regain his spiritual strength on the Quest; he goes mad. Readers sympathize with Lancelot's breakdown, because he really has hoped to find the strength to break off with Guinevere. He is torn by his love for Arthur and his love for Guinevere, and his failure on the Quest only compounds his frustrations. The next three idylls show Lancelot as a contributing cause of Camelot's failure, but Tennyson has previously developed Lancelot's character so the reader does not place sole blame on him. In "Pelleas and Etтарre," the sight of Lancelot drives Pelleas wild with disgust and rage. In "The Last Tournament," Lancelot's lack of supervision tacitly condones the raucous behavior of the unchivalrous knights. In "Guinevere" the Queen remembers Lancelot's initial innocent and respectful love for her. Tennyson's Lancelot is a sympathetic character, because he is a deeply sensitive man who knowingly but unwillingly contributes to the fall of an Order and a king he loves.

Merlin holds a unique position in Camelot, for, like Arthur, he clearly comes from some place beyond the human sphere:
Him, the most famous man of all those times,
Merlin, who knew the range of all their arts,
Had built the King his havens, ships, and halls,
Was also bard, and knew the starry heavens;
The people call'd him wizard . . . (M&V, ll. 164-8)

Merlin can perceive the ideal; he is the poet and seer. Yet, possessing powers to change men and nature, he still sees Camelot not as the ideal kingdom he helped make, but as a place where fallible, often nefarious people live.

Merlin has a wide range of magical powers. He is responsible for producing an heir for Uther, "... Merlin tho his craft, / And while the people clamor'd for a king, / Had Arthur crown'd ..." (CA, ll. 233-5) He stands near the Lady of the Lake when Arthur receives Excalibur. He makes Camelot "... spire to Heaven," (C&L, l. 302) and then builds Arthur the Siege Perilous and the King's mighty hall with the four mystical zones of sculpture. Merlin can also change forms at will or "... walk / Unseen at pleasure . . ." (CA, ll. 346-7) He possesses Bley's magical book, only twenty pages long, containing on "... every page of text an awful charm." (M&V, l. 671) Even Merlin cannot read the text, although he can read the comments in the margin, the source of his magical powers.

Yet with all his magical abilities, Merlin, like his master Bley and like Arthur, is mortal. Being mortal, he is subject to human feelings and emotions. His mortality makes Merlin an enigmatic character:

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he is a mortal, but he is a wizard; he has emotions, yet he can control almost all things around him. Merlin's human qualities and his magical vision are combined in his acute ability to see things around him for what they are and to feel human sorrow that not even he can change the course of some events. This power to see the future makes him the major realist in Arthur's kingdom. He is the first person realizing that Camelot is doomed to failure. In his riddle in "The Coming of Arthur," Merlin says, "A young man will be wiser by and by," (CA, l. 403) meaning Arthur would realize he could not civilize Britain using his ideal standards of behavior. And in "Gareth and Lynette," the seer Merlin says to Gareth that in Camelot Arthur binds men to vows they cannot keep.

Merlin knows of Camelot's doom, but he does not know how to prevent it. His sense of absolute futility about changing what is about to happen totally depresses him. "Then fell on Merlin a great melancholy," (M&V, l. 187) and he flees to the woods of Broceliande to think. He feels "A doom that ever posed itself to fall" (M&V, l. 189) upon him, which will "sweep me from my hold upon the world / My use . . ." (M&V, ll. 301-2) He is aware that his fame will bring his death, yet he does not know how to prevent it. He knows Arthur needs his counsel to rule Camelot effectively, and that without his guidance, Camelot is surely doomed to destruction by outside and inside forces.

A personal reason also compels Merlin to leave Camelot, and that reason is Vivien. Merlin is the only older person of any importance in Camelot. His age as well as his position sets him apart from everyone except Arthur. He is a lonely old man, and Vivien charms him. Her
constant attention eases his loneliness and flatters his ego. "Tho' doubtful, felt the flattery, and at time / Would flatter his own wish in age for love, / And half believe her true . . ." (M&V, ll. 182-4)

Feeling the powers of her charms and " . . . first devotion . . . ," (M&V, l. 181) Merlin almost believes she really cares for him. He wants to imagine he is still in his younger days when, "Full many a love in loving youth was mine." (M&V, l. 545) Yet he intuitively knows she fawns on him to learn his magical charm, so " . . . her glory would be great / According to his greatness whom she quench'd." (M&V, ll. 214-5) Merlin cannot decide what to do about Vivien, so he runs from her. But Vivien follows him like a vulture circling the carrion before diving down to eat it. Like the bird Guinevere and Lancelot release for hawking, Vivien " . . . pounded her quarry and slew it." (M&V, l. 133)

Merlin is in a state of complete mental exhaustion in the woods of Broceliande. He feels Vivien a soothing balm, for she lays beside him, kisses his feet, plays with his beard, and clings to him. He knows she is leading up to something: "To what request for what strange boon, / Are these your pretty tucks and fooleries, / O Vivien, the preamble?" (M&V, ll. 262-4) As she babbles, he senses she really does not love him: " . . . Who are wise in love / Love most, say least . . ." (M&V, ll. 245-6) He realizes, "Yes, by God's rood, I trusted you too much!" (M&V, l. 374) He recognizes that her bitterness against Arthur's court stems from her failure to tempt them and that she has come to Merlin, who is perfect for her use: "Him, the most famous man of all those times."

(M&V, l. 164) She is at her peak of mental agility while Merlin is
gloomy. Even though Merlin possesses magical powers, it is not a fair battle, and Vivien senses her advantage. She first flirts with him, coyly playing with his beard. She then petuantly scolds him for being so quiet. When Merlin apologizes and grants her a boon as a peace offering, she asks for the knowledge of his charm to make him wholly hers. She asks to be trusted totally and insists she only wants to please him. When Merlin implies she might use the charm on people who have spoken ill of her, she "... frowning wrathfully ... / ... let her tongue / Rage like a fire among the noblest names." (M&V, ll. 702, 799-800) Merlin bitterly mumbles she is as bad as a harlot. Vivien, sensing his extreme displeasure, becomes docile and says she spoke disparingly of the knights only because she sees all other men being so far below Merlin. Merlin half believes her flattery and accepts her apology, "For ease of heart . . . ." (M&V, l. 891) Seizing her advantage, Vivien insists the only way she can believe she is not a harlot in Merlin's eyes is if he tells her the charm. As a bolt of lightning strikes, she clings to him for protection, calling him:

... lord and liege,  
Her seer, her bard, her silver star of eve,  
Her God, her Merlin, the one passionate love  
Of her whole life. (M&V, ll. 951-4)

Vivien overtalks Merlin and finally wears him down. Merlin rationalizes the bitter evidence against her "Within him, till he let his wisdom go." (M&V, l. 890) He sleeps with her and tells her the charm. His susceptibility to her flattery cost him his power and his life. Arthur loses his guide and counselor, and without Merlin, Arthur cannot see reality and act to prevent trouble.
In Malory Merlin is also a wizard, but Tennyson changes his personality, and his relationship with Vivien, called Nimue. Malory portrays Merlin as a dirty old man: "And always Merlin lay about the lady to have her maidenhood." Nimue, fearing he is a devil's son, wants him to stop bothering her. With her own powers she makes Merlin go under the magic stone. She then weaves a charm, making him unable to move. Tennyson changes the situation from Malory to suggest that if the wisest and most perceptive person in Camelot falls victim to the wilesome flattery of an obviously scheming and deceitful female, then the kingdom is doomed to destruction. F. E. L. Priestly has the same thought: "Merlin has been the chief support of Arthur's system, the chief witness of Arthur's kingship. After he is gone, the reality of the ideal, the validity of Arthur's kingship is judged by other standards," and the standards become those of people like Vivien.

The two minor realistic characters are Dagonet and Sir Bedivere. Dagonet is one of the most interesting characters in the book. He is the fool and mock knight of Arthur's court. In keeping with the traditions of the court, the fool is the only person who can speak the truth and not be punished. Dagonet loves Arthur and his ideals, for he sees that Arthur at least tries to make men out of beasts, even though the attempt seems futile. When Dagonet appears in the story, the fool is Arthur's

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53 Priestley, op. cit., p. 245.
only true follower, and his function in "The Last Tournament" is to show how far the formerly great knight Tristram has fallen from his vows. The fool refuses to dance to Tristram's harp music, for Tristram has broken the music of Arthur's court. Dagonet denounces Tristram for harping downwards in helping spread the gossip of Lancelot and Guinevere and then feeling "So witty that ye play'd at ducks and drakes." (LT, l. 342) As Tristram mockingly says of the fool, "Fear God: honor the King - his one true knight - / Sole follower of the vows." (LT, ll. 302-3) Yet Dagonet, who has been swine-like, is purified by Arthur's influence. He admires the King and hates those mocking his idol. Dagonet tells Tristram he will not see the Harp of Arthur in the heavens at any time, for only the true believers hear the silent music of Arthur's Order. The only people worthy of hearing this sign of the Order are, "And I and Arthur and the angels hear." (LT, l. 349) Dagonet feels Arthur is his "... brother fool, the king of fools!" (LT, l. 353) and he loves the King for being so idealistic to think he can work his pure ways on the base men of the kingdom.

Dagonet is an interesting combination of one sincerely admiring Arthur yet being very realistic. One of his functions in the story is to take Merlin's place as the seer of the kingdom. Yet, being the fool, like the prophetess Cassandra, he is doomed to have nobody listen to him. It is noteworthy that only two characters, Merlin and Dagonet, are truly realistic about life in Camelot, but they both admire Arthur's ideals and hope they will work. But Dagonet in the end seems totally defeated in spirit by the evil consuming the court. He can no longer feel delight
in the illusion of his king's ideals. After the unchivalrous last tournament, the massacre of the Red Knight by Arthur's young knights, and the death of Tristram, Arthur comes home and Dagonet sobs at his feet, "... I am the fool, / And I shall never make thee smile again." (LT, ll. 755-6)

Sir Bedivere's function is to show how one of the good knights changes from the time of his original vows to Arthur. Bedivere, "... bold in heart and act and word was he / Whenever slander breathed against the King," (CA, ll. 175-6) is the first knight Arthur crowns and the last knight of Arthur attending him at his death. Bedivere initially upholds with dignity the Round Table's honor. However, by the time of the last battle, Bedivere has become materialistic. After the last battle when Modred severely wounds Arthur, Bedivere tries to comfort the dying king. He tells Arthur, "... Thy name and glory cling / To all high places like a golden cloud / Forever ..." (PA, ll. 53-5) He assures Arthur he will be "King everywhere! and so the dead have kings, / There also will I worship thee as king." (PA, ll. 148-9) But Bedivere's words are of little comfort to Arthur, for his last knight will not perform a final task for the dying king. Arthur asks Bedivere to throw Excalibur in the "middle mere". As the moon flashes on the exquisitely jeweled sword, Bedivere rationalizes that he should keep the sword for posterity and tells Arthur he has obeyed his command. The second time Bedivere tries to throw away Excalibur, he becomes "... clouded with his own conceit," (PA, l. 278) and again hides the sword. Not until Arthur threatens Bedivere with death does this last knight obey his King's last command. Even
then, Bedivere has to close his eyes, "... least the gems / Should blind my purpose..." (PA, ll. 320-1) As the last knight, Bedivere panics at the thought that "And I, the last, go forth companionless," (PA, l. 440) yet Bedivere will tell the story of Camelot's past glory. Bedivere is essentially a good knight, yet his materialistic instinct puts him in the category of a realist, seeing Arthur's sword for its monetary worth, instead of an idealist seeing Excalibur as a symbol of Arthur's ideal kingdom. As with many of the knights, Bedivere's vows adversely affect him, instead of elevating him. Bedivere does not regress as far as Tristram, but he is different from the man who is initially so bold in heart and act. Rather than remaining idealistic, Bedivere becomes realistic about Arthur's accomplishments, and in a final act of desperation he wishes to save some of the past glory for himself in the form of Excalibur.

The remaining male figures in Arthur's kingdom are evil. Either they are wicked--like Tristram, Gawain, and Kay--in that they flagrantly disobey their knightly vows and make a mockery of Arthur's ideals, or, they hate Arthur, think his pure ways foolish, and actively seek to destroy Camelot. This latter group includes Modred, Limours, Edyrn, Earl Doorm, Pellam, and Garlon. All these men are minor characters, and they show different reasons why Arthur's kingdom falls.

Tristram's function in "The Last Tournament" is to show how far the heroes have fallen. Dagonet the fool is the hero of "The Last Tournament," not the once mighty Lancelot or Tristram. Tristram and Lancelot's passions bring their fates upon them, and the savagery of Arthur's young
knighted is a logical extension of the degradation of Tristram and Lancelot.\(^{54}\) Tristram and his lover Isolt are in the same situation as Lancelot and Guinevere. He even claims to take his example of adultery from the chief knight and the Queen: "Crown'd warrant had we for the crowning sin." (LT, l. 572) Yet the potentially great Tristram differs from Lancelot. Lancelot tries to live up to his potential. When his vows conflict with his love, Lancelot tries to destroy the love ruining him. Tristram does not try to diminish his passion. He accepts his love as his primary urge and relegated his knightly vows to second place. Another factor behind Tristram's inferiority to Lancelot is chronological. Tristram "... came late, the heathen wars were o'er, / The life had flown ..." (LT, ll. 269-70) He is not present at Camelot's inception when the power of the potential ideal binds every man to strive to achieve his best. By the time Tristram arrives, the knights have started falling from their vows, and Tristram can only see that the knights "... swear but by the shell." (LT, l. 270)

Tristram is evil in the total disrespect he pays Arthur and his ideals. At the last tournament, when the best knights are absent, Tristram wins by flagrantly breaking the laws which once ruled the mighty tournaments. As Lancelot reluctantly gives him the prize of gems, Tristram scorned Lancelot's disgust, saying, "Great brother, thou nor I have made the world; / Be happy in thy fair Queen as I in mine." (LT, ll. 203-4)

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\(^{54}\)Boyd Litzinger, "The Structure of Tennyson's 'The Last Tournament,'" *Victorian Poetry*, I (1963), 59.
Tristram by-passes the courtesy of awarding the prize from the tournament to the fairest lady present. He states that his Queen of Beauty is not present, so he will keep the prize. Dagonet accused Tristram of being instrumental in breaking the harmony of Arthur's Order: by his bad example of adultery, by spreading the gossip of Lancelot and Guinevere, and by questioning Arthur's birthright as king. Tristram rationalizes these actions by saying that the King has only the fool as his one true follower, and that he does not need to justify his actions to Dagonet:

"I am but fool to reason with a fool." (LT, l. 271) Tristram feels the vows he has made run counter to his true nature and therefore he can never keep them, "... inviolable vows / Which flesh and blood perforce would violate." (LT, ll. 683-4) "Tristram's denunciation of Arthur and the vows," states William Brashear, "is based essentially on his perception that they are unnatural and have no definite sanctions in a world of real things." Tristram feels it is most important to love, "Free love--free field--we love but while we may," (LT, l. 275) and he leaves Camelot to visit his lover Isolt, the wife of his cousin Mark.

With his further degradation in the tournament, Tristram begins to resemble more the beast-like men than the proud knight he used to be. His shield bears the likeness of a spear, harp, and bugle. He dresses all in forest green. He is a creature from the forest, and Isolt chastises him for now acting like the beasts of the woods. She can see that as his knightly vows no longer influence him, he is becoming like her

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beast-like husband Mark:

Far other was the Tristram, Arthur's knight!
But thou, thro' ever harrying thy wild beasts--
Save that to touch a harp, tilt with a lance
Becomes thee well-art grown wild beast thyself.

(TT, ll. 629-32)

Tennyson radically changes Malory's Tristram. Malory treats Tristram as second in greatness only to Lancelot and devotes Books VIII through X to him. Launcelot and Tristram are the "two best knights that ever were in Arthur's day, and the best lovers." Tristram's name means sorrowful born child, for his birth causes his mother's death. Yet, he becomes a great knight, who even saves Arthur's life with Nimue's help. He is the best harper, the best chaser, the noblest blower of horn; he knows everything possible about venery and hawking. His only flaw is that, like Launcelot, he is occasionally afflicted by madness. He once flees to the wilderness for a quarter of a year, living naked with herdsmen and shepherds with his hair clipped off. As in Tennyson's story, Launcelot hates Tristram, but for a different reason. In Malory, upon hearing of Tristram's marriage to Isould of the White Hands, Launcelot says that Tristram is untrue to his first lady, La Beale Isould. Even though Launcelot has loved and admired Tristram, "Let him wit the love between him and me is done forever, and that I give him warning from this day forth as his mortal enemy."

Tennyson drastically alters Malory's Tristram to show the fallibility of men, whether they are great or ordinary. Like Lancelot,

56 Malory, op. cit., p. 197. 57 Ibid., p. 129.
Tristram is to be an example to less noble men. But when the noblest fail to live up to their vows, then there is no hope any other man can live up to his best self. Tennyson makes Tristram a knight of great potential who, finding his vows too rigid casts them aside. Tristram, like Lancelot, is a man who could make Arthur's Order a reality, but his adultery helps doom Arthur's kingdom to failure.

Gawain is Arthur's nephew and brother of Gareth, Gaheris, and Modred. In Malory, Launcelot and Gawaine are Arthur's favorites. "Sir Gawaine, my sister's son . . . the man in the world that I loved most . . . in Sir Launcelot and you I had my joy and my affiance." But Tennyson's Gawain is a traitorous knight, more interested in the role of the great lover than that of a good knight. He is ironically named " . . . the courteous, fair and strong, (I&E, l. 553) and he might be a good knight, were he not the brother of Modred and the child of Lot. He is described thus: Nor often loyal to his word . . . ," (I&E, l. 558)

" . . . his wonted courtesy, / Courtesy with a touch of traitor in it," (I&E, ll. 634-5) "A reckless irreverent knight . . . ," (HG, l. 853) and "With smiling face and frowning heart . . . " (I&E, l. 551)

Three separate incidents--his encounter with Elaine, his involvement with Pelleas and Ettarre, and the Holy Grail quest--reveal his true character. After the Diamond Tournament, Arthur assigns Gawain the task of finding the unknown wounded victor and giving him the prize. But Gawain is waylaid on his quest, for he finds flirting with Elaine in

58 Ibid., p. 407.
"... amorous adulation..." (I&E, 1. 646) a much more pleasant task. When he realizes Elaine loves Lancelot, he knows he is wasting his time and leaves. Once back in Camelot, Gawain starts the gossip that Lancelot has a new lady. With Pelleas and Ettarre, Gawain again proves a more reliable lover than knight. Gawain sees Ettarre's three knights beating Pelleas, and "... through his heart / The fire of honor and all noble deed / Flash'd..." (P&E, 269-71) Gawain, with good intentions, agrees to act as spokesman for Pelleas, even though Gawain thinks Pelleas is acting foolishly. Swearing by the Round Table's honor to assist a fellow knight, Gawain within three days is sleeping with Ettarre. Before the Holy Grail Quest, Gawain, trying to make up for not seeing the Grail in Arthur's hall, "... sware, and louder than the rest..." (HG, 1. 202) to see the Vision. Rather than finding the Quest a period of subjugation and humiliation, Gawain feels, "My twelve month and a day were pleasant to me." (HG, 1. 747) His only discomfort again relates to his prowess as a lover. Having sufficiently rationalized that he is not meant to see the Holy Grail, he finds a silk pavilion filled with maidens. However, a gale blows everything around. Gawain is a minor character in the three idylls just mentioned, "Lancelot and Elaine," "The Holy Grail," and "Pelleas and Ettarre". In each story, Tennyson structures the situation so Gawain can either practice knightly ideals or exploit the situation to his own advantage. Three times Gawain chooses not to follow his vows. His function as a character is to show in different situations why Arthur's ideals are hard to put into practice. Since he is Arthur's nephew, his lack of discipline is even more
significant. Presumably, the people closest to the King would be the ones seeing the greatest value in Arthur's plan, and they would try the hardest to help Arthur accomplish his goals. But Lancelot, Guinevere, and Gawain fail Arthur. Following the Knightly Code at all times requires a very strict mental discipline, and Gawain and Tristram find their vows conflict with their own personal desires. Gawain lives up to his vows at his own convenience. He is a selfish opportunist setting a bad example and helping destroy Arthur's kingdom.

Sir Kay, the seneschal, in Malory's story is Arthur's foster brother. He is the first knight who fails to live up to his vows of charity, because he does not feel his vows are practical. In the "Gareth and Lynette" idyll, a woman who has openly mocked Arthur and questioned his birth, asks the King for help: to save her son a wicked uncle holds captive. When Arthur helps, Sir Kay thinks he is foolish. Sir Kay thinks it is dangerous to give charity to a former enemy. Sir Kay can see no reason to treat Gareth unlike the other kitchen servants, even though Lancelot points out that Gareth's physical features mark him as one of high lineage. When Arthur makes Gareth Lynette's knight, Kay thinks Arthur is crazy, because the men of the Round Table are supposed to be exceptional, not common servants. Kay undermines the King's ideals in that he is skeptical that Arthur's intense idealism is always good. For this reason Sir Kay functions importantly to the "Gareth and Lynette" idyll. This idyll occurs when Camelot is at its best. Everything is going well for Arthur, and his reform on the people seems effective. This idyll presents the rosiest view of Camelot. Sir Kay serves as a
reminder that not every person thinks Arthur and his ideals work perfectly, and since this viewpoint comes from one of Arthur's knights, the feeling cannot be dismissed as unimportant.

Mark the Cornish King is the antithesis of Arthur. Arthur urges every man to seek his best potential and to follow a code of strictly moral conduct. Mark wants to destroy any illusions people have about man's capacity for goodness. Arthur sends his knights as emissaries to right any wrongs or injustices. Mark sends Vivien to find some flaw to expose, then destroy Arthur's Order. The "... graceless Mark" (M&V, 1.62) is a creature of the woods outside Arthur's kingdom, and he reacts as a wild animal, striking out at the object gaining so much of his territory. Mark is jealous of Tristram to the point of violence, and he beats his wife Isolt often for her liaison with Tristram. As the cuckolded husband, Mark has reason to be jealous. However, his uncivilized behavior towards his wife and her lover (Mark, too, has a lover, Vivien) in cleaving Tristram through the brain from behind contrasts to Arthur's forgiveness of Lancelot and Guinevere at the convent. Mark's function as a character in the Idylls is to represent the active evil force outside Camelot constantly trying to destroy Arthur. Mark is a king, setting an example for his subjects. But instead of being a good ruler, interested in helping his people, Mark is an evil man, using his power to try and destroy any good King Arthur accomplishes.

Tennyson retains Malory's evil characters—Mark and Modred—for different reasons. Tennyson wants to represent different types of evil people. The fallen knights—Tristram, Gawain, and Kay—contrast to the
good knights, while men like Mark and Modred are inherently evil. In Malory, Mark is Tristram's uncle. Mark travels to England in disguise to kill Tristram, but Launcelot catches him and makes him swear never to slay or betray Tristram. If Mark breaks his word, Launcelot will kill him. But Mark, the treacherous, cowardly, king, eventually kills Tristram. Mordred in Malory is inherently evil because he is the product of incest. Malory states that incest, even by the King, leads to ruin. Mordred is traitorous, greedy, and jealous of his father's affection for Launcelot. He plans to destroy Launcelot by having witnesses catch him with Guenever. Mordred catches the lovers and starts the war leading to the Round Table's destruction. Mordred makes himself King by falsifying letters saying Arthur is dead. Mordred even arranges to marry Guenever, but she locks herself in the Tower of London. Arthur finally kills his son in battle, but not before Mordred strikes Arthur with a fatal blow.

Tennyson's Modred is not the product of incest, although in one version Tennyson has Arthur speak of Modred as his nephew. Modred would be more effective as an evil character had he the reason, as in Malory, for revenge upon his father. However, Tennyson's Arthur is too good a figure to have an incestuous relationship. Modred, like Mark, is a man who innately hates good. As a knight, Modred's shield is "... blank as death ..." (G&L, l. 409) He has gray beady eyes and a narrow fox face. He has one purpose: to seize the throne by subtly disrupting the Round Table. He is the lurking vulture throughout the Idylls, who is

59See p. 22.
finally killed by one of his intended victims, Arthur. Modred's function as a character as William Brashear states, is that of "... a silent force. He is death, who continually watches, and is on crucial occasions terrifyingly glimpsed by others of the characters."60

Three evil male characters are discussed together, for they have the same function in the Geraint idylls. Geraint's lack of trust makes him disregard his vows to Arthur and behave less like a stately knight. The three evil characters--Edyrn, Limours, and Earl Doorm--represent the degrees to which Geraint is in danger of falling if he does not stop his insane testing of Enid. Edyrn, Limours, and Earl Doorm are creatures of the wilderness and examples of uncivilized men. The Sparrow-Hawk, Edyrn, son of Mudd, slanders the name of Earl Yniol and his family, sacks his house, and ousts him from his Earldom. After Edyrn's men see Geraint beat him in a tournament, Edryn declares that his pride is broken and he will reform. Tennyson significantly makes only this one evil male character capable of reform, and Edyrn's cousin Enid fears the reform is only temporary. Edyrn is a very minor character, and while his reform is beneficial to Arthur, it is not as beneficial as Tristram and Gawain's reform would be. The latter two are under Arthur's authority, but the influence is not strong enough to make them be good knights. If Arthur's effect can only reform one minor character, then Arthur is not very influential in his subjects' lives.

60Brashear, "Tennyson's Tragic Vitalism: The Idylls of the King," p. 41.
Edyrn is the first degree to which Geraint has fallen, for Geraint could reform his bad behavior. Limours is the next step downward which Geraint is taking. Geraint has "... molten down in mere uxoriousness," (MG, 1. 60) and, like Limours, he is interested only in pleasure. Limours, Enid's former suitor, cares only for drinking, brawling, and wooing. While Enid is married to Geraint, Limours tries to persuade Enid to come with him. When she refuses, Limours tells his men she consents.

Earl Doorm is the worst Geraint can be. His bandit knights attack and rob innocent travelers having the unlucky fortune to be in their territory. Then they fight like dogs over their booty. Doorm fancies Enid, and he physically tries to force her to eat and drink; and finally in frustration, he slaps her. He is "... the brute earl...," (G&E, 1. 711) and he represents the total degradation Geraint is in danger of reaching.

While Limours and Earl Doorm represent uncivilized brutes having no real contact with Arthur because they live outside the kingdom, the other two evil characters, Pellam and his nephew Garlon, are active in trying to destroy Camelot from within. Pellam makes a mockery of Arthur's religious life by boasting his life is purer than the King's. Feeling he needs tangible proof of his claim, Pellam surrounds himself with "price-less" religious relics. His nephew Garlon constantly degrades Arthur and his knights. Garlon cannot wait to tell Balin of Lancelot and Guinevere's affair. Garlon might be the vile black devil of the woods violently killing Arthur's knights. Pellam and Garlon set up a court contrasting Arthur's. While Arthur shows his knights' deeds as proof of his Order,
Pellam and Gardon rely on worthless relics, black magic and slander to accomplish their purposes. In the "Balin and Balan" idyll, Tennyson shows two different types of evil which will ultimately contribute to Arthur's ruin. Geraint's madness foreshadows Balin, Lancelot, and Pelleas' madness. Secondly, the brawny spearmen of Earl Dorn growling like dogs degrade to Pelleas' howling wolves. Garlon's slander of Arthur, Lancelot and Guinevere paves the way for Vivien's slander which destroys Balin. Evil is starting to consume the kingdom, and Pellam and Garlon represent an extension of evil forces which begin having influence in the Geraint books.

The male characters of the Idylls of the King represent a wide cross section, from Arthur the Christ-like man to Modred, a lurking, cowardly traitor. Through the contrasts and similarities of characters and the various functions they serve in the story, Tennyson organizes his poem. The men are the most numerous but not always the most predominant characters in the kingdom. The female characters in the Idylls are also important. The first installment of the Idylls, privately published in 1857, is entitled "Enid and Nimue: The True and the False." In 1859, Tennyson added two other female portraits, Guinevere and Elaine; the title of this work became "The True and the False: Four Idylls of the King". So the first published Idylls study the women in Camelot.

The seven major female characters are Enid, Elaine, Lynette, Isolt, Guinevere, Ettarre, and Vivien. No minor female characters are of great importance to the poem's structure. The major characters will be discussed under the various categories of the male characters, the
builders and the destroyers of Arthur's kingdom; a character's intent determines her category. I do not keep Tennyson's original categories for the women of Camelot for two reasons. First, "The True and the False" does not encompass all the females. Tennyson published eight idylls after 1859, and he added new characters who do not fit into the original two classes. Secondly, the poet develops contrasting and similar male and female characters. It is necessary to study the men and women together, for they must both work in harmony to achieve a balanced society. As W. S. Johnson says:

The masculine must be complemented by the feminine, although the man and woman can not successfully reverse their roles, as they do . . . subtly in the Idylls. When there is harmony of the two, the result is life; but when there is no such harmony men and societies are self-centered and they die. 61

Therefore, a discussion of the women in Camelot considers how they complement their men in adding to the kingdom's harmony, how they resemble or contrast to a male or another female figure, and how they function in the story.

Two idealists are the true wife Enid and the true maiden Elaine. However, Enid is perceptive while Elaine is not. Enid's function is to show to what degree a wife can help her husband achieve his highest potential. Enid is the model of patience, loyalty, and constancy. The song she is singing when Geraint first sees her reflects her philosophy: to submit to Fortune's wheel and neither love nor hate the fate she receives,

but to remain stoic "... Thro' sunshine, storm, and cloud." (MG, I. 348) Thus, when Geraint challenges her loyalty, she dons her old rags, endures her husband's jealous gibes, and performs all the inane tasks Geraint requires. Her exemplary behavior finally makes Geraint realize her loyalty. Geraint unjustly accuses and tests her, but Enid does not mind so long as he still loves her. As a model wife, she is obedient to the point of absurdity, but she wants to be a perfect wife to Geraint, and she is perceptive enough to see what she has to do to keep her husband. By maintaining her patience and loyalty through Geraint's jealous madness, she saves her marriage. She perfectly complements Geraint. She is like the youthful idealist Gareth, for she makes her ideals applicable to her life.

Elaine's function in the "Lancelot and Elaine" idyll is to show Lancelot's degree of involvement with the Queen. Lancelot is legally but not psychologically free to take a wife, and his refusal to love Elaine shows this. Also, Elaine's tender care and love for Lancelot contrasts with the Queen's jealous wrath. Elaine, fair lovable lily maid of Astolat in the Idylls of the King, is the character from Tennyson's poem, "The Lady of Shallot". She so wraps her life around a fantasy world that she cannot endure the realities of life. Living in a remote castle with only her two brothers, her father, and an old dumb servant, she does not know about love between a man and a woman. When she finally meets a man outside her family (and the reader wonders whether any kind man would become the man of her dreams), she fixes all her idealizations upon him and loves him--Sir Lancelot. She dreams about him all night,
"And all night long his face before her lived." (I&I, l. 329) She even envies the hand he lays on his horse. When he returns injured from the Diamond Tournament, she dreams he is ill and rides off to find him. Seeing her favor still on his helm, she misinterprets the situation and thinks he means to tourney with it again. Elaine's misfortune is that she idealizes Lancelot and everything about him so much that she misreads reality. She cannot see through her fantasized vision. She takes Lancelot's platonic love toward her as a sign of the love she feels for him. When she first senses her love is in vain, because Lancelot thinking of Guinevere, would speak curtly, Elaine feels she must die. She fantasizes so much, she cannot live apart from her make-believe world. She knows no reality other than Lancelot, and he symbolizes all life to her. Without him, she will die. W. David Shaw relates, "For Elaine, who is imprisoned in subjective fantasy, the death of her illusion, which is sanity, is also the moment of her physical death." She dies, deluded like Balin, as an indirect result of Guinevere and Lancelot's love, still believing that Lancelot is infallible.

Enid can apply her ideals to her life, but Elaine cannot. As F. E. L. Priestly states, "Ideals are for application to life, to human nature. If they involve a turning of the back upon life they are barren at best, destructive at worst." 63 Like Pelleas, Elaine


cannot see the flaws of the person she idealizes, and her imperceptive-
ness causes her death. Like Gareth, she is a youthful idealist coming
into contact with a realist. The irony of the "Lancelot and Elaine" idyll
is that as a complement to Lancelot, Elaine is perfect. Lancelot recognizes
this fact, and "... a sacred fear" (I&E, l. 352) gnaws at him as he
gazes at her beautiful face. He tells Elaine, "... true you are and
sweet / Beyond mine old belief in womanhood." (I&E, ll. 949-50) Yet his
love for Guinevere, "The shackles of an old love straiten'd him, / His
honor rooted in dishonor stood, / And faith unfaithful kept him falsely
true." (I&E, ll. 870-2) Malory devotes Chapter IX through XX in Book
XVIII to the Lancelot and Elaine story, and Tennyson changes very few
details of this tragic love story.

The realists—women who are not deluded by Arthur's ideals and who
see Camelot with its flaws—are Lynette, Isolt, and Guinevere. Though
they do not wish to destroy Camelot, they make no effort to help realize
Arthur's ideals. The proud, harsh Lynette in the Idylls of the King
has the same temperament in Malory. Lynette, with her hawk eyes and
slender turned up nose, demands that Arthur give her Lancelot or another
noble knight worthy and able to do her quest, rescuing her sister Lyonors.
When Lynette receives Gareth as her rescuer, she feels nothing but contempt
for the King and the knave Arthur assigns her. Lancelot judges from
Gareth's appearance that he is noble, but Lynette cannot. She sees only
a kitchen servant wanting to play a knight. Like Geraint, she constantly
berates a person and puts him through a series of tests to prove his
worth. She calls Gareth names, tells him he smells, scorns him in front
of other people, and treats him like a servant. Even when the young knight has beaten six knights, Sir Morning-Star, the Sun Knights, and the Star of Evening, she only begrudgingly praises him by calling him the "... kingliest of all the kitchen-knaves." (G&L, l. 1129)

Lynette cannot idealize anyone. To her, a man's appearance signals his worth, and since Arthur assigns her a kitchen knave as a knight, she sees Gareth only as a knave. After Gareth performs incredible deeds, she begins to realize he is much more than he appears, but she still does not wholly accept him as a knight. Not until she learns of his noble birth does she accept him. Like Geraint, she is misled by appearances, and like Guinevere and Ettarre, she is unable to judge the worth of a good man willing to fight all battles for her. As long as Lynette tries to dominate their relationship, she is nothing but a nuisance to Gareth. She encourages him at his battle only after she learns he is Arthur's nephew.

Lynette plays an important role in the "Gareth and Lynette" idyll. Here the Round Table is strong and unified. The action is seen from Gareth's optimistic viewpoint, so the reader sees a very idyllic situation. However, Lynette disregards the idealizations and treats Gareth's perfect king with contempt when Arthur displeases her. Lynette, like Sir Kay, is a reminder to the reader that Camelot is not a dream kingdom with perfect knights. Because of her skepticism of Arthur's decision and doubts of Gareth's abilities, the reader is alerted that there are skeptics in Arthur's kingdom who see a realistic picture of life in Camelot.
As in Malory's story, Tristram loves two Isolts: his wife and his mistress. His wife Isolt of the White Hands is in Brittany, while his mistress Isolt of Britain is with her husband Mark. Hating her violent husband as much as she adores her lover, Isolt lives to see Tristram. Mark beats and abuses her because of Tristram, but she will not give up her lover. In the original medieval tale of Tristram and Isolt, the two lovers drink a love potion binding them to an eternal love. Tennyson omits this part of the legend, because he does not want to give Tristram an excuse for an adulterous affair. Tennyson unlike Malory, is not sympathetic to illicit lovers; and he deliberately alters Malory's story, deleting the love potion for Tristram and Isolt and Lancelot's madness for Lancelot and Guinevere, to stress that these affairs are entered with full knowledge.

What puts Isolt in the realist category is that she sees Tristram as a worse person once he breaks his vows to Arthur: "Far other was the Tristram, Arthur's knight." (LT, l. 629) She sees that although the knights' vows are unrealistic, they elevate men from their inherent beast-like tendencies. If Tristram can break his vows to his king, then no other vows he makes to her can be trusted as binding. And so Isolt fears his promises of love to her are as empty as his vows to Arthur. Her function in "The Last Tournament" is to take over where Dagonet leaves off to constantly remind Tristram of how far he has fallen from his former greatness. Seeing Tristram for what he has become, she almost tells him to leave, but the jewels he brings win her. Like Bedivere, Isolt lets her sense of what is right be overruled by the
allure of beautiful jewels. Like Guinevere, she is the adulteress, although Isolt's husband is hardly as forgiving as Arthur. To her husband Mark, she is only an object he jealously possesses. Tennyson never mentions any feeling of love Mark has for his wife. Vivien complements Mark better than Isolt does. Isolt does see that her lover is not living up to his best potential, and like Dagonet, she nearly succeeds in making him reevaluate his actions. For this reason only does she serve as a worthy companion to Tristram.

Guinevere is the female character of the poem, and Tennyson changes very little of Malory's character. The author characterizes her so well that the reader really sees the soul of a person. She is a realist, not a destroyer. She sees through the glory of the ideals to their effect on people, and how people, except Arthur, cannot live up to the vows. But she does not deliberately seek to undermine Arthur in his work, for when she finally realizes the damage she has done, she repents. She is not classed as a destroyer of Camelot only because her intentions are not evil.

Guinevere does what is natural; she lives like Tristram, more by the nonrestricting laws of nature than by the manmade laws, such as her marriage vows. When Lancelot first comes to bring her to Arthur, she finds him wonderfully warm. This impression contrasts to her first reaction to Arthur, whom she thinks, "... cold, / High, self-contained, and passionless ... " (G, 11. 401-2) Initially thinking Lancelot is a man much more suited to her desires, she never really gives herself a chance to love Arthur.
As the Queen, she is beautiful, stately, regal and domineering to all around her. (Significantly, the only time she humbles herself is in the abbey when she finally realizes the worth of Arthur and the chance she has missed to be his true Queen.) She dominates most of all her lover Lancelot. He is responsive to her slightest wish, and in their relationship, she is definitely the stronger one. The first time the reader sees the two together in "Balin and Balan," Lancelot moves as if to pass her without speaking, and she challenges him by asking if he means to show disloyalty by not wishing her good morning. In "Lancelot and Elaine," trying to please her, Lancelot declines going with Arthur to the Diamond Tournament, only to have Guinevere berate him for making the wrong decision. Nearly killed at winning the prize diamonds for her in nine years of tournaments, Lancelot, upon returning from Astolat, presents the prize to Guinevere. Extremely jealous of Elaine, the Queen stands tearing leaves off a vine while Lancelot talks to her. Upon receiving the costly jewels, she throws them into the river, saying her lover's gift does not mean anything, because his heart is not loyal to her.

Her relationship with Arthur is quite different. Finding him initially cold and taking a lover to replace him, Guinevere blinds herself to his human qualities. She calls him the faultless king, who never does anything wrong to her, but who has no craft to rule other people. She thinks he wrongly makes his knights swear to impossible vows. Until her final repentance, she loves Lancelot, "For who loves me must have a touch of earth," (I&E, l. 133) and she does not think Arthur has any
qualities she can love. One of her greatest faults is that she never really gives herself a chance to love her husband, because she does not want to. As F. E. L. Preistley states, "The defect of recognition precedes from a defect of will."

If the reader had no other chapter of the poem after "The Last Tournament" to see Guinevere's character, she would remain a jealous, domineering, shrewish, self-indulgent adulteress, hardly a complimentary portrait. But Guinevere in Malory is not all bad, and Tennyson has no reason to change radically her character. Just as the author does not show Arthur's humanness until the "Guinevere" idyll, neither does he show Guinevere's gentleness until the same chapter. Plagued by Modred's constant watch of her, she feels haunted. She begs Lancelot to see her only one more time, but Modred catches them and shames her forever. She finally begins to realize how much she has betrayed Arthur, "Would God I couldst hide me from myself! / Mine is the shame, for I was wife . . . " (G, ll. 117-8) She flees to Almesbury and lives with her thoughts. Still the realist, she petulantly tells the novice prattling about Camelot's greatness before Guinevere's sin that " . . . ill prophets were they all, / Spirits and men. Could none of them foresee . . . / . . . what has fallen upon the realm?" (G, ll. 270-4) When the novice asks whether Lancelot or Arthur is the greater man, Guinevere still chooses Lancelot, and she thinks to herself, "And weep for her who drew him to his doom." (G, l. 346) She knows she has not attained true repentance, "For what

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64 Priestley, ibid., p. 249.
is true repentance but in thought-- / Not even in inmost thought to think again / The sins that made the past so pleasant to us?" (G, ll. 371-3)

When she is in the presence of Arthur for the last time, she finally realizes the magnitude of her sin, and she cannot look at her husband because of her shame. As Arthur talks about the Round Table and how she was to help build his ideals, not destroy them, she realizes her sin with Lancelot helped destroy a hope that man could be more than he ever thought he could be. By not seeing Arthur as a real man enclosed in perfect man, Guinevere chooses to love someone other than the highest person. Had she loved Arthur and helped set a good example, Camelot might have been an ideal kingdom. W. David Shaw concludes:

Although she feels at first Arthur will not allow her all she wants, Guinevere finally realizes there is a form of necessity not opposed to freedom, but rather another aspect of it. Arthur is the "highest and most human too," for his authority appeals to the mind rather than to the body alone, and confers dignity on the person who accepts it.65

Guinevere's love for Lancelot is one reason for Camelot's failure, and as she states, her sin is greater than Lancelot's because she is married. Her function throughout the Idylls is to show specifically how her adultery contributes to Camelot's weakness. In "The Coming of Arthur," she originally does not even see Arthur as he rides by her window, although she impresses Arthur so much that he drives out the heathens, slays the beasts, and cuts down the forest to let the sunshine in. Already there is a flaw in their relationship, but Arthur is mighty, so

65Shaw, _op. cit._, p. 45.
Guinevere marries him.

In "The Round Table," every time Tennyson tells the story of a single knight, Guinevere is always a cause of his ruin. Geraint's distrust of Enid stems from Enid's close association with the Queen:

\[ \cdots \text{and there fell} \]
\[ \text{A horror on him lest his gentle wife,} \]
\[ \text{Thro' that great tenderness for Guinevere,} \]
\[ \text{Had suffered or should suffer any taint} \]
\[ \text{In nature . . . (MG, ll. 28-32)} \]

Balin chooses the Queen's crown as the symbol for his shield, but he overhears Lancelot and Guinevere talking in the garden and feels, "Queen? subject? but I see not what I see. / Damsel and lover? hear not what I hear." (B&B, ll. 276-7) His madness returns, and he "\[ \cdots \text{tramples on the goodly shield to show / His loathing of our Order and the Queen.} \]
(B&B, ll. 541-2) This act causes his death at the hands of his brother.

In "Lancelot and Elaine," Tennyson clearly shows Guinevere's association with Lancelot. Her domination of him nearly costs him his emotional stability and his life. For the next idyll tells of Lancelot's madness on the Holy Grail Quest, which results from his liaison with the demanding queen. In "Pelleas and Etтарre," the young knight is wild and desperately tries to calm himself with the reassurance that Arthur and his knight are good. But Guinevere and Lancelot are in Arthur's hall, not the king, and their presence is enough to ruin any hope of good left in Pelleas.

The next idylls show a much more sympathetic portrait of the Queen. In "The Last Tournament," Guinevere knows the glory of the Round Table is gone, and "\[ \cdots \text{in her bosom pain was lord.} \] (LT, l. 239)"
At last her feelings echo Arthur's, (LT, l. 485) but she is lamenting a
death she helps cause. Her function in the idyll is to show how all
three great people--Arthur, Lancelot, and Guinevere--know Arthur and his
knights' glory has passed, while destroyers of the kingdom, the Red
Knight and Tristram, are establishing a new type of infamous glory. Her
sadness with the lawless jousts paves the way for her repentance in the
next idyll. In the "Guinevere" idyll, the Queen finally tells her story.
Merlin has told Vivien (M&W, ll. 771-5) that before the Queen's marriage,
when Lancelot comes to get her, she thinks Lancelot is the man she is to
marry, "So fixt her fancy on him . . . " (M&W, l. 775) Her involvement
with Lancelot at the court was originally innocent, and Tennyson allows
Guinevere to remember this. But Tennyson does not give the point when
Guinevere and Lancelot's affection becomes love, for when Guinevere's
thoughts reach this point in her reminiscences, Arthur arrives in the
convent. This last idyll allows Guinevere to give her point of view.

Several other characters contrast with Guinevere, the main female
character. Guinevere's jealous love of Lancelot is the opposite of
Elaine's sweet tender love for him. Guinevere also contrasts with the
patient, exemplary wife Enid, whom Geraint unjustly accuses, while Arthur
never accuses Guinevere until the very end. The Guinevere and Lancelot
relationship dominates the poem, and their illicit love adversely affects
Enid, Balin, Elaine, Pelleas, and Tristram.

The final two female characters in the Idylls--Etтарre and Vivien
know only evil as a philosophy and see Arthur's kingdom representing all
they loathe. Etтарre's large violet eyes are haunts of scorn. She is so
beautiful she almost seems unreal, but her beauty is only external. She
treats Pelleas like a dog and finds his childlike devotion repulsive.
She is gracious to Pelleas only once, when he gives her the circlet mak­
ing her the center of attention at a tournament. After the tournament,
she calls him Sir Baby, sends her three knights to drive him away, then
finally binds him and leaves him to die. She mocks him and his vows and
says of Arthur, "... I never heard his voice / But long'd to break
away..." (P&E, ll. 247-8)

Ettarre is like Lynette, except that Ettarre's character is worse.
Tennyson characterizes Ettarre as a harlot unable to praise any goodness.
Lynette, at least by admiring Lancelot's greatness, shows a respect for
knightly prowess. As the domineering, belittling damsel-errant, Ettarre
is also like Guinevere. When Ettarre, Lynette, and Guinevere try to
rule the men caring for them, they cause an unbalanced relationship lead­
ing to disharmony. Significantly, all three women revile men who are
better persons than they, but all three see in the end what they miss by
not loving a good man. Personal reform is possible if the sinner is
willing to change, and—like Edyrn, Percivale, Lancelot, and Guinevere—
Ettarre repents. She finally wonders to herself why she cannot love a
better man. And her "... ever-veering fancy turn'd / To Pelleas ... and thro' her love her life / Wasted and pined, desiring him in vain."
(P&E, ll. 483-6)

Ettarre's function in the "Pelleas and Ettarre" idyll is to show
the extent of decay in Arthur's kingdom and to be an adversary to Pelleas.
The enemy of the young knight is not a brute from the wasteland, but a
beautiful female. The love-crazed knight declines to a passive fool and then wild beast. Ettarre initially is scornful and wayward, but she becomes passive and repentant. The knight becomes the enemy, and the harlot becomes the true lover. Nothing is right in Arthur's kingdom.

For Vivien there is no redemption, because she does not wish it. She is both child and agent of death. Her father dies fighting against Arthur and her mother dies on his dead body, bearing her child among the dead. Feeling there is no such thing as purity, she sets out as Mark's agent to destroy any illusions man has about the validity and necessity of virtue in Arthur's kingdom. Mr. Priestley appropriately comments on Vivien's character:

Vivien's whole being is dedicated to one purpose, destruction of the Order; she has no fleshly motive for her wickedness, nor does she need any; her motive is essentially the hate felt by evil for good.66

Vivien is evil, for like Mark, Tristram, Ettarre, and Guinevere, she can only see the failings of the men trying to live up to high ideals. William Brashear relates she is "... blind to the necessity for the dream and, consequently, cannot herself be raised by it. And so her delight is in the destruction of the dream... She delights in man's nothingness rather than grieving over it."67

One of the tragedies of the Idylls of the King is that Vivien is much more successful in her mission than Arthur is in his. Calling her-

66Priestley, op. cit., p. 244.

67Brashear, op. cit., pp. 34-5.
self the rat, once in Camelot she seeks to ferret out each man's weakness and expose it. She is successful, because most of the great knights have a flaw they try to hide beneath the veneer of knightly vows. In Lancelot, Vivien sees his love for the Queen. She thinks Percivale sins once when he is drunk. She assumes Arthur knows about Lancelot and Guinevere's love and is a coward and fool for not doing anything about it. She sees Balin's gullibility and tells him about Lancelot and Guinevere's affair. She "... let her tongue / Rage like a fire among the noblest names, / Polluting and imputing her whole self, / Defaming and defacing ..." (M&V, 799-802) And when she cannot find the flaw, she creates one and starts a rumor about the knight; so she even slanders Galahad's name. Slander is one of her weapons, seduction is the other.68 Failing to tempt Arthur and his knights, she sets out after an easier but better target, a lonely, older man who is more susceptible to her flattery and devotion. This man also has great powers, which she wants. The man is Merlin, and her success with him means that she robs Camelot of the wizard perceiving the real as well as the ideal. Without his chief advisor telling him how well his ideals are working, Arthur is doomed to be misinformed and unaware of his knights' weaknesses. Vivien's success with Merlin also means an evil triumph of intellect. Vivien outtalks and outsmarts Merlin. She plays to his moods, tells him what she thinks he wants to hear, then attacks with a new argument. Her function is to show how evil can triumph over the most intellectual mind in Camelot. With Merlin's charm, the harlot

68 Priestley, loc. cit.
Vivien now becomes the most powerful person in Camelot. A very practical reason also explains Vivien's appearance in the *Idylls*. If Merlin remains Arthur's advisor, the King would be well aware of what is going on in his kingdom. Since Arthur's trusting nature and lack of perception are causes for his kingdom's fall, Tennyson has to eliminate Merlin. Tennyson has a wily, evil mind triumph over a wizard, foreshadowing that her victory will be Camelot's defeat.

Vivien is the perfect complement to Mark and Modred, and together the three of them work to destroy Arthur. No other female character is as thoroughly wicked as she, thriving on evil rather than good. The final significant aspect of Vivien's personality is noted previously in the discussion of Merlin: Tennyson drastically changes Malory's character. In Malory's version, Nimue (Vivien) is helpful to Arthur and his knights, and she marries Pelleas. Betty Miller offers an interesting explanation for the change. She states, "To Tennyson, nothing was more repugnant, apparently, than the thought of a man of eminence becoming at the prompting of his senses the slave and dupe of a woman."\(^{69}\) So the poet makes Merlin ignore her advances until he is too weary to fight her flattery any longer. This reason is valid, although there are better answers. Tennyson establishes an elaborate system of contrasts and similarities among characters, and without Vivien Mark and Modred have no female counterpart. Also, her function is to remove Merlin from Camelot.

Her craftiness makes her the perfect evil character to triumph over the wizard.

The function of the duality of personalities and the contrasting and similar characters, organizes the Idylls. Through his characterizations, the poet represents, "... the thousand related bifurcations of the spirit which cross hatch the poem's thematic issues."[70] (A discussion of characterizations relating to the poem's themes will be in Chapter Four.) The characters show one way Tennyson structures his work. The importance of the various characters in each idyl helps the reader understand the progression of action, as the builders of Arthur's kingdom become weaker, and the destroyers of the kingdom gain more and more influence. Tennyson takes great care in portraying his characters and making them work in different ways, and he structurally unifies his work through his characters.

The following summary of characters' functions and their similarities and differences shows how characters structure the Idylls. "The Coming of Arthur" has no major character except Arthur, and he never speaks. Three minor characters--Leodogran, Bellicent, and Bedivere--tell about Arthur's mysterious birth, making him seem like a distant figure. Guinevere, also a minor character, is unimpressed by Arthur, but her father gives her to Arthur. In "Gareth and Lynette," the major character Gareth and the minor character Lancelot show how to practice

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the vows the knights take in "The Coming of Arthur". However, Lynette, a major character, and Sir Kay, a minor character, are skeptical about the practicality of Arthur's goodness and the Knightly Code.

The Geraint books develop further testings to prove a person's worth. In the Gareth idyll, Lynette cruelly tests Gareth so he might prove she is a good wife. Gareth easily defeats the evil knights in the Gareth idyll, but Limour's followers wound Geraint, and Earl Doorm wants to make Geraint one of his band. Arthur appears at the end of the "Geraint and Enid" idyll to praise Edryn's repentance but Enid fears her cousin Edryn's reform is only temporary. Also, the reform is only of a very minor evil character.

The "Balin and Balan" idyll shows evil forces are gaining influence in Camelot. Geraint's mad jealousy of Enid turns into Balin's violent black moods. Enid, not Arthur, saves Geraint from ruin, because she is stronger than the evil forces influencing Geraint. However, Balin's source of strength, his brother Balan, is away from Balin. Without his brother, Balin is not stronger than the evil forces surrounding him. In Balan's absence, Balin chooses a new source of strength, Lancelot, not Arthur. But Lancelot proves to be a false example of goodness. Most of the minor characters in the "Balin and Balan" idyll work to destroy Balin, bringing on his repressed madness. Balin sees Lancelot and Guinevere as lovers, and Garlon and Vivien reinforce to Balin gossip of Guinevere's infidelity. Balin regresses to his savage ways again.

The evil characters are gaining more influence, and "Merlin and Vivien" shows the triumph of evil intellect over the powers of the wizard.
Garlon and Vivien are minor characters in "Balin and Balan," and Tennyson shows how they destroy Camelot by slandering the names of the knights and Guinevere. In "Merlin and Vivien," Vivien slanders the name of any knight she can. Then, she plays to Merlin's moods, changes her arguments to keep her advantage, and finally extracts from Merlin his secret of the charm. The harlot is now the person with magical powers.

"Lancelot and Elaine" studies the influence on Lancelot of Guinevere's domineering love. He nearly dies for her, but her jealousy of Elaine consumes her, and she treats Lancelot coldly. Elaine, on the other hand, is patient and kind, and like Enid, she complements her man well. While Geraint's weakness is his inability to trust his wife's fidelity, Lancelot's weakness is his inability to break off with Guinevere. Sir Kay as a minor character in the "Gareth and Lynette" idyll falls from his vows because they do not seem practical. Gawain now as a minor character falls from his vows because they are inconvenient to him. As a minor character, the King suspects Lancelot and Guinevere's love, but like Lancelot, he does not take definite action.

"The Holy Grail" idyll shows the effect of their vows on the knights. The King is absent from Camelot, causing his knights to turn to a vision for guidance. Three knights see the Holy Grail. The once proud Percivale sees it and narrates the idyll in a repentant tone, giving a realistic appraisal of the Quest's worth. Bors sees it, because he is a good man, but Tennyson does not tell much about him. Galahad sees it, because he is a perfect character. Galahad's stainless character makes Arthur, by comparison, a more credible figure. When his knights
return from the Quest, Arthur realistically appraises its worth to each knight. Lancelot is torn between his love for Arthur and his love for Guinevere. Like Geraint and Balin before him, Lancelot is afflicted by madness. Lancelot wants to see the Vision, but his adultery keeps it from him. The evil characters, Gawain and Modred, have no sincere desire to see the Vision.

The knights' disillusionment in the futile Holy Grail Quest becomes Pelleas' total disillusionment in the "Pelleas and Ettarre" idyll. Tennyson compares the situation of Pelleas to Gareth, and Ettarre to Lynette. But Pelleas' disillusionment drives him wild and the harlot Ettarre foolishly pines away in vain for Pelleas. Minor characters Gawain and Percivale act as catalytic forces, helping cause Pelleas' downfall. Lancelot functions as a minor character, too. He is mad on the Holy Grail Quest, and now the sight of Lancelot drives Pelleas mad.

"The Last Tournament" shows that all chivalry is dead. The minor evil characters since Sir Kay in the "Gareth and Lynette" idyll have been proving that Arthur's ideals do not totally influence all people. Now, Guinevere, Lancelot, and Arthur acknowledge together the death of chivalry, and Dagonet, the realistic fool, joins their lament. The evil characters are the victors in this idyll: Tristram wins a tournament, and Mark kills him. Arthur's young knights defeat the Red Knight, but their unchivalrous victory is worse than defeat for Arthur.

The total lawlessness of Arthur's realm can only bring death. Everything of Arthur's is destroyed, and he must fight his own people in the end. In the "Guinevere" idyll, the death of his kingdom brings a
realization to Arthur of why he fails. He tells his story, and Guinevere tells hers. They both give their points of view on what has happened and their justifications for their actions. But their retrospective view is meaningless, for neither can repair any damage they caused. Arthur and Guinevere finally understand themselves and each other, but their realizations come too late.

The evil Modred triumphs in the last idyll, for he causes Arthur's death. In the "Guinevere" idyll, Arthur realizes his part in his kingdom's death, and Bedivere's actions in "The Passing of Arthur" gives a final example of how Arthur adversely affects a good man.

A close study of character function in the twelve separate Idylls shows the poem is a unified story, for the major and minor characters function to show how well Arthur is succeeding. As the good people diminish in importance or have more and more vulnerable flaws, the evil characters keep gaining steady influence and taking advantage of the weakness of the builders of Arthur's kingdom. Tennyson's skillful use of a wide cross section of characters gives great unity to his poem.
CHAPTER THREE

The Idyls of the King is a study of how institutions affect people. The twelve separate poems show different ways two institutions—the Knightly Code and marriage—influence Arthur's people in Camelot. The two institutions are closely related, because Arthur binds his knights to him through the Knightly Code, and a good marriage helps a knight keep his vows. A study of the two institutions' effects on Arthur's people, in conjunction with the study of characters, involves another unifying device in the poem.

The need for some civilizing force is acute for the people of the "... great tracts of wilderness, / Wherein the beast was ever more and more, / But man was less and less, till Arthur came." (CA, ll. 10-12) Arthur's "grand and heroic illusion" temporarily serves a useful purpose. The "... wolf-like men, / Worse than the wolves ... " (CA, ll. 32-3) need to be raised from their barbaric ways, and swearing allegiance to Arthur and his knightly Code accomplishes this. However, swearing to follow a set of ideals so different from their innate natures presents a problem. The action of the Idyls of the King deals with this problem: how can men live up to vows contradicting their basic natures without causing catastrophic effects? But, if the vows are less idealistic, is reform possible?

Arthur draws the "... knighthood-errant of this realm and all /

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The realms together . . . " (G, ll. 459-60) under him. He is their Head, and he makes them swear to him as if he is their conscience. His Knight Code stresses " . . . utter hardihood, utter gentleness, / And, loving, utter faithfulness in love, / And uttermost obedience to the King." (G&L, ll.542-4) He binds his knights:

To break the heathen and uphold the Christ,  
To ride abroad redressing human wrongs,  
To speak no slander, no, nor listen to it,  
To honor his own word as if his God's  
To lead sweet lives in purest chastity,  
To love one maiden only, cleave to her,  
And worship her by years of noble deeds,  
Until they won her . . . (G, ll. 467-75)

The reason for this strict code is to civilize a lawless people. Initially causing an "instant reform," it provides the illusion that the Round Table and its ideals are a valid institution for Arthur's people. Yet, the vows are so idealistic and against the men's basic nature (Galahad and Arthur being the only exceptions) and the vows over a period of time are only a thin veneer of idealism. Slowly the cracks grow, making the knights feel bewildered and hypocritical, which leads to their ruin. Tristram told Isolt:

The vow that binds too strictly snaps itself--  
My knighthood taught me this--ay, being snapt--  
We run more counter to the soul thereof  
Than had we never sworn . . . (LT, ll. 652-5)

The failure of the Knightly Code results from Arthur not trying to maintain the knights' humanness. Arthur eradicates the knights' sense of identity and imposes his new identity upon them. Because Arthur asks them to be so much better than they are, the knights need a constant example to follow and emulate, for an emotional prop. Arthur, who as W. D.
Shaw states, unites the precept and example\textsuperscript{72} is too often away fighting the heathens outside his realm. He does not realize his knights need him at home as a constant example. Not finding their king present, the knights look to Arthur's chief knight and closest friend, Lancelot, for guidance. But in Lancelot they see only a violation of the goals. Lancelot's bad example only reinforces the knights' doubts about their ability to follow the high ideals.

Another type of emotional prop the knights turn to is the Grail Quest. The knights are filled with self-doubts, and Tennyson shows this in the struggles of Geraint, Balin, and Lancelot. But, "... if a man / Could touch or see it [the Holy Grail], he was heal'd at once, / By faith of all his ills ... " (HG, ll. 54-6) Arthur's knights want to see the Holy Cup to regain their faltering belief in their vows. Also, if the "... brother knights ... fast and pray, / ... per chance the vision may be seen / By thee and those, and all the world be heal'd." (HG, ll. 125-8) The knights feel the Grail Quest will strengthen Arthur's Order, but Arthur knows most of the knights will "... follow wandering fires / Lost in the quagmire. Many of you, yea most, / Return no more ... " (HG, ll. 319-21) Mr. Priestley states the problem well when he says that the proper way to faith is through individual works.\textsuperscript{73} Arthur tells his knights, "This chance of noble deeds will come and go /


Unchallenged..." (HG, ll. 318-9) The knights need to prove the strength of their vows by doing noble deeds in the King's name, but instead they chase a vision. Arthur knows few knights will gain the strength they seek, and their absence destroys his Order: before they leave, Arthur wants to "... count / The yet-unbroken strength of all his knights, / Rejoicing in that Order which he made." (HG, ll. 325-7) The Grail Quest destroys, not strengthens, the Round Table.

The Knightly Code fails to refine the knights because they need a realistic Code of Behavior to follow in their daily lives. If they could feel confident that in little things they are upholding Arthur's ideals, then with some degree of self-assurance, they could work on the larger, more idealistic tasks. However, Arthur's vows are of such nature that even the less important vows are extremely hard to keep. If a knight is not even supposed to listen to gossip, then how can Arthur expect him to redress all human wrongs?

Therefore, as an institution, the Knightly Code is not valid for Arthur's people. "The ideals," says Mr. Solomon, "were the strength and weakness of the kingdom." The vows cause the knights, if only temporarily, to try and live up to a perfect code of behavior. For Geraint, Percivale, and Lancelot, lasting reform is possible, because they want it. However, the vows do not permanently elevate a majority of the knights, and a few people cannot sustain Arthur's kingdom. To make ideals such

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as Arthur's work, every knight needs to embody the vows. But Arthur's kingdom ends with a civil war, decimating the ranks of good and evil knights alike, leaving only a memory of Camelot.

Marriage is the second institution affecting Arthur's people. A discussion of Camelot's marriages concerns the need for marriage and the influence of marriage on the people of Camelot. Of the fifty-eight characters in the Idylls, only fourteen of them are married: Bellicent and Lot, Earl Yniol and his wife, Geraint and Enid, Mark and Isolt, Arthur and Guinevere, Tristram and Isolt, and the Lord of Astolat and Leodogran, whose wives Tennyson does not even mention. Since all characters are adults, the lack of marriage is puzzling. Marriage ideally unites two compatible people who gain from being with each other. Even under less ideal conditions, marriage suggests a love between two people needing each other. The small percentage of married people in Camelot suggests either few people are compatible, or that love outside marriage is as acceptable as marriage itself to many people in Camelot.

Tennyson describes two marriages very briefly—Bellicent and Lot and Earl Yniol and his wife—and three marriages well: Geraint and Enid, Mark and Isolt, and Arthur and Guinevere. Bellicent's husband Lot is all but dead and she lives through her children, especially Gareth. Bellicent and Lot's relationship is more a nurse caring for a dying man than a marriage. Enid's mother is always in the background, and she does anything her husband wants. She is quiet and obedient, and the marriage seems solid and happy. Enid and Geraint's marriage has to go through a great trial period to become solid and happy. Enid, like her mother, is
quiet and obedient. She submits to Geraint's ludicrous trials to keep him as her husband.

Tennyson hints at unbalanced marriages in the "Gareth and Lynette" idyll with Bellicent and Lot's empty marriage. With the exception of Enid's mother and father, the marriages in Camelot become more unbalanced and barren as the Idylls progress. Lawrence Poston correctly feels that marital disharmony is a central theme to the Idylls.75 This disharmony is extremely influential, because the King's marriage and some of his best knights' marriages are always in the open for people's inspection. Significantly, only a few people know about the happy marriage of Enid's parents, and this marriage has little significance to the poem's action. This imbalance in marriage affects the men's performances as knights. When Geraint is a poor husband, he is also a poor knight. Also, as Tristram ignores his vows to his wife Isolt of Brittany, he falls from his vows to Arthur. Since Tristram lives up to his marriage vows at his convenience, his vows to Arthur have little meaning.

Mark, with his savage ways, is so cruel he often beats his wife Isolt, who is more an object of his scorn than his love. Finding Vivien more compatible for him, he largely ignores Isolt. With both Tristram and Mark's marriage, a definite incompatibility results in adultery. This is also the case with the important marriage in the book, Arthur and Guinevere. This marriage sets the example for all other marriages and affects

nearly all people in Arthur's kingdom. Like Mark and Tristram, Guinevere feels more satisfied with a lover than with her mate. But as with most societies' double standards, adultery seems worse when the guilty party is the woman, especially when she is the Queen. Isolt has some justification for adultery, since her brutish husband has a lover. Also, she is a weak character whose misconduct affects only herself, her lover, and her husband. But the Queen sets an example for all other women. Isolt, Vivien, and Ettarre follow Guinevere's example, "Then others, following these my mightiest knights, / And drawing foul example from fair names, / Sinn'd also . . . " (G, ll. 486-8) Guinevere's adultery disillusions men and women in Camelot, for fidelity in marriage is the highest moral rule in Camelot. Arthur feels only through pure love can a man keep down his base elements and develop a love of truth. A pure marriage develops a man's best potential.

Marriage is supposed to redeem human life, not destroy it, says W. S. Johnson. But Guinevere and Lancelot's love indirectly causes the death of Pelleas, Balin, and Elaine, and then casts a shadow upon all relationships. The Queen rejects her husband and finds what she thinks is true compatibility with Lancelot. But she is a victim of an illusion of her own making, just as so many other people are victims of some type of illusion in love. Geraint feels Enid is untrue to him. Balin loves Lancelot and the Queen as a symbol of goodness. Merlin half believes Vivien's attention to him is love. Elaine loves Lancelot, feeling he is

infallible. Pelleas loves Etarre, feeling she is a grand lady. Tristan and Guinevere never give themselves a chance to love their mates, feeling they are better suited to love someone else. And Arthur thinks his Queen is happy with him and is helping set a good example for other people.

Marriages in the Idylls produce no new life. All the sterile relationships—Tristram and Isolt, Mark and Isolt, and Guinevere and Arthur—produce no children, and Geraint and Enid have children only after they reestablish marital harmony. The author symbolizes lack of love and compatibility in barren marriage. Even when Arthur gives Guinevere the Nestling to care for, the child dies. The Queen is not capable of giving life to a child she does not bear. Tennyson shows the sterile relationships between man and wife as lovers replace the mates, and no children are born to consummate the marriage. The marriages are physically, but not emotionally, consummated.

Although marriages cause frustration and suffering, marriage as an institution is of the highest importance. Most of the people in the Idylls are lonely or isolated from others: Gareth, Enid, Elaine, Balin, both Isolts, Guinevere, and Arthur. Only through a true love can an individual find his or her place with others and feel completeness as a human being. One of the tragedies of the Idylls is that too often, people look to the wrong people to love. They either find their love unreturned, or they find a person incompatible with their needs. Arthur's Knightly Code too strictly binds his knights, causing them to fall from their vows. This institution adversely affects Arthur's people. However,
marriage as an institution elevates a person if a person wisely chooses his spouse. Tennyson feels only through a good marriage can a person live up to his highest potential, and the *Idylls of the King* is a study of how people are aided or destroyed by marriage.
CHAPTER FOUR

Jerome Buckley says in his excellent chapter, "The City Built to Music":

The idyl is strictly a picture of mood, character, or gesture; and each of the Idyls moves through a series of sharply visualized vignettes towards its pictured climax, its moment of revelation. Though a few characters recur as links between some of the idyls, the unity of the sequence lies not in action or plot but in theme, imagery, and atmosphere.77

Chapter One shows a plot does not tightly structure the work. The writer will expand on Buckley's ideas to show how Tennyson very deliberately unifies the Idyls through atmosphere, imagery, and theme.

The Idyls' atmosphere follows a seasonal cycle, starting with a wasteland in winter, followed by renewal of life in spring, which precedes the growth period during the summer. After the maturation period, autumn, the time of the harvest, sets in, followed by the winter, when all growth ceases. Nature's cyclic pattern frames the action of the poem. Mr. Buckley relates that Tennyson gives each idyll an appropriate seasonal setting, so that the background accents the action in the foreground and symbolizes the condition of the realm.78

Cameliard is a barren wasteland before Arthur comes, where man's growth morally or spiritually is not possible. The beast, representing the basest and most savage tendencies of man, dominates the wasteland,

78Ibid., p. 173.
And thus the land of Cameliard was waste, \ Thin with wet woods, and
many a beast therein, \ And none or few to scare or chase the beast."
(CA, ll. 20-2) Great tracts of wilderness grow, stifling any fresh
growth for man or nature. Arthur aids King Leodogran and brings a re-
newal of life into the once barren land. Arthur ushers in spring to a
sterile, empty land.

The spring begins all life, and the seeds planted develop during
the summer. Arthur conquers the heathens and prepares the land for a
new type of life. He swears a deathless love with Lancelot, " . . . his
warrior whom he loved / And honor'd most . . . " (CA, ll. 124-5) Arthur
tells him, "Let chance what will, I trust thee to the death." (CA, l.
133) Arthur builds his Round Table stamping each knight in his likeness.
He receives Excalibur from the Lady of the Lake. In late April, Lancelot
brings Guinevere to Arthur. The King marries Guinevere, telling her that
he will love her to the death, and that he joins her fate with his through
marriage. Also, spring is the time for youthful love and idealism.
Gareth comes to Camelot when the birds are singing and "The damp hill-
slopes were quicken'd into green, / And the live green had kindled into
flowers, / For it was part the time of Easter day." (G&L, ll. 181-3)

Tennyson often uses May to symbolize a hopeful fresh beginning or
purity. Lancelot returns with Guinevere "Among the flowers, in May . . . "
(CA, l. 451) As the retinue travels back to Arthur, Guinevere and Lancelot
are "Rapt in sweet talk or lively, all on love / And sport and tilts
and pleasure, --for the time / Was may-time, and as yet no sin was
dream'd--" (G, ll. 383-5) Arthur marries his Queen while "Far shone the
field of May thro' open door, " (CA, l. 459) and "The sun of May descended on their King." (CA, l. 461) After Arthur's marriage, the knights sing to him rejoicing, " . . . our Sun is mighty in his May! / Blow, for our Sun is mightier day by day!" (CA, 11. 496-7) Lynette's pride and wrath cannot slay the " . . . may-white . . . " (G & L, l.642) of Gareth's optimism, and on Gareth's quest, the birds sing May music. Arthur readmits Balin to the Order. Balin feels he has rejoined the music of the realm, so he is like "The Nightingale, full toned in Middle May," (B&B, l. 209) but his music grows faint. When Vivien comes to Camelot, Guinevere accepts and helps her. The Queen, in comparison to Mark's creature, seems "All glittering like May sunshine on May leaves." (M&V, l. 86)

Significantly, Tennyson devotes only one book of the Idylls, "Gareth and Lynette," to Camelot's May. After Gareth's optimistic, hopeful quest, summer begins, when the seeds sown in the spring begin to develop. Yet not only Arthur's seeds but dormant wasteland seeds which he thinks he has eradicated also begin to have life. The long summer months of Camelot last from the Geraint idylls to the "Pelleas and Ettarre" idyll. True love in marriage to which Geraint has sworn in his vows comes only after he cruelly tests his wife. Arthur readmits the man-beast Balin and makes him a knight, but Balin cannot keep his vows without Balin's help. Balin leaves Arthur's court to find peace of mind, but Vivien drives him to kill his brother by bringing to the surface all his dormant savage tendencies. Just as Vivien, the crouching beast from the wasteland, helps destroy Balin, she also causes Merlin's destruction. Merlin is Arthur's chief advisor, but with Merlin " . . . lost to life
and use and name and fame" (M&V, l. 968) because of Vivien, the ominous shadowing of the beast which Arthur has stilled, grows stronger upon Camelot. Also, the hints of Lancelot and Guinevere's liaison in the Geraint books becomes Vivien's outright gossip in the "Balin and Balan" idyll. Tennyson mentions the season is full summer for the Lancelot and Elaine story. Lancelot is true to his vows of loving one maiden, but the maiden is the Queen. His falsely true love causes him to reject a pure maiden loving him. By summer, Lancelot and Guinevere's love has begun to wane, and Lancelot recognizes Guinevere's jealousy of Elaine is "... dead love's harsh heir, jealous pride." (I&E, l. 1367) The Holy Grail Quest shows spiritually empty knights, whose vows to the King taken in the spring need reinforcement by summer. The Quest for the Holy Cup is another ominous sign that the seeds Arthur planted in spring will not mature as he hoped. By late summer, when the nights are still and hot, and when some fields are already flattened by the harvest, Pelleas comes to Camelot. Pelleas represents the new generation of knights filling the void left by the destructive Grail Quest. But Pelleas, states William Brashear, comes to Camelot after Guinevere's sin destroys Arthur's illusion and after the Quest breaks up the old order. "This is no atmosphere in which the spirit of youth can prosper, and it is significant that while Gareth had Lancelot ready behind him to assist and guide him, Pelleas had Gwaine." 79

Storms and bad weather pervade Camelot's long summer, suggesting growing destruction of Arthur's Order. Even in the "Gareth and Lynette" idyll, when Camelot is still pure, the young knight fights the Black Knight under "... a cloud that grew / To thunder-gloom, palling all stars ... " (G&L, ll. 1323-4) By the Geraint books, the rumors of Lancelot and Guinevere's love begins symbolically "... breaking into storm ... " (MG, l. 27) By the "Merlin and Vivien" idyll, the building storm breaks. Throughout this idyll, Tennyson makes references to the gloomy atmosphere preceding the destructive storm, "A storm was coming," (M&V, l. 1) "And the dark wood grew darker toward the storm."

(M&V, l. 888) Vivien tells Merlin she is not false to him, and if she lies, a bolt of lightning can strike her. A bolt of lightning does strike, and the storm begins. After "... the storm, its burst of passion spent," (M&V, l. 959) Merlin has fallen to Vivien, and Camelot's doom is imminent. The bad weather prevalent during the Holy Grail Quest brings the coup de grace to the Order Arthur establishes in the spring. As Percivale follows Galahad on the Quest, lightning strikes all around, setting fire to the dead trees. When Lancelot is on the Quest, he finds a barren shore where a loud blast disturbs all nature around him, even the clouded skies. And the storm resulting from the empty Quest causes the physical crumbling of Camelot, which the knights find on their return.

By "The Last Tournament," the decay setting in during the summer consumes the kingdom. Only Dagonet the fool remains Arthur's true follower. Lancelot cannot answer straightforwardly as Arthur requests
him to judge the tournament, and with "... slow sad steps" (LT, l. 143) Lancelot assumes the judge's chair. Even Arthur notices that his knight's manner is "... somewhat fallen from reverence." (LT, l. 119) Dis-courtesies and rule violations mark the last tournament. Guinevere cannot stand the jarring revelry after the tournament, and, angry with Tristram's behavior and the "... lawless jousts, / [she] Brake up their sports, then slowly to her bower / Parted, and in her bosom pain was lord." (LT, ll. 237-9) The Red Knight of the North declares Excalibur a straw, and Arthur's younger knights "... slimed themselves" (LT, l. 470) for a victory. "So all the ways were safe from shore to shore, / But in the heart of Arthur pain was lord." (LT, ll. 484-5) The kingdom's decay brings death to the knights, and the beast Mark axes Tristram through the head from behind.

Tennyson makes explicit references to autumn throughout "The Last Tournament". Dagonet "Danced like a wither'd leaf before the ball" (LT, l. 242) as yellowing autumnal woods surround Camelot. At the tournament, the morning breaks "... with a wet wind blowing," (LT, l. 137) and the autumn thunder rolls as the jousts begin. "And ever the wind blew, and yellowing leaf, / And gloom ..." (LT, l. 154-5) After the tournament, "Then fell thick rain ... / ... and the wan day / Went glooming down in wet andweariness." (LT, ll. 213-5) Tristram rides to Isolt "... beneath an ever-showering leaf," (LT, l. 491) and Arthur comes home from his fight with the Red Knight "All in a death-dumb autumn-dripping gloom." (LT, l. 750) Boyd Litzinger comments appropriately on this idyll's structure:
The consistency of this tone and imagery is remarkably appropriate to the poem's theme. This is the Autumn of the Round Table, a Fall of muck and marsh, mud and filth, not of trees turned red and brown and gold. No golden day's decline, this is the prelude to a deadly winter, the time of Modred's treachery and Arthur's passing. If the ideals of Arthur budded in the Spring and bloomed in Summer, this autumn sees them blown, and Winter will see them dead. 30

The deadly winter of "Guinevere" and "The Passing of Arthur" completes the cycle of seasons. Tennyson makes explicit references to winter in these last two idylls. Guinevere leaves the court when the dead earth is still, and "... she to Almesbury / Fled all night by glimmering waste and weald" (G, ll. 126-7) in a cold wind. The land is barren and still in "... the dead world's winter dawn." (PA, l. 442) The winter destroys all Arthur starts in the spring. Leodogran has said to Belligent, "A doubtful throne is ice upon summer seas," (CA, l. 247) and Arthur now fights Modred for his kingship. Arthur swears to Lancelot he will trust him no matter what happens, and this trust keeps the King from seeing a relationship ruinous to his Round Table. At his marriage, Arthur tells Guinevere, "Behold thy doom is mine," (CA, l. 460) and she destroys Arthur's dreams for Camelot. When the Lady of the Lake gives him Excalibur, Arthur sees the writing saying, "Take me ..." (CA, l. 302) and on the other side of the blade, "Cast me away! ...") (CA, l. 304) In the winter of his defeat, Arthur throws back his magical sword. Guinevere, whose love for Lancelot helps destroy Arthur's kingdom, will never see her lover again, and she finally realizes what her love for

30Boyd Litzinger, "The Structure of Tennyson's 'The Last Tournament,'" Victorian Poetry, I (1963), 54.
Lancelot has cost Arthur. With the Round Table only a past illusion and with only three living knights--Percivale, Lancelot, and Bedivere--the final destruction is Arthur's death. Without him, no new life will appear in the spring unless the people of the kingdom themselves try and reestablish order. But there is hope. Arthur swears a deathless love for Lancelot and Guinevere, and both repent their sins, proving their worthiness of Arthur's love. If the two people closest to Arthur who knowingly sinned can repent, then other people of the kingdom can follow their good example, and a new cycle can begin. The author thus ends his poem, "And the new sun rose bringing in the new year." (PA, l. 469)

The poem's atmosphere follows the cycle of the seasons, starting and ending with a barren wasteland. Each idyll has a seasonal reference, showing the strength or weakness of Arthur's kingdom. Tennyson carefully structures his action and descriptions to fit a cyclic pattern, giving his poem unity. Within the context of the atmosphere, Tennyson develops three major image patterns--flowers, colors, and music--which are fresh or good in Camelot's spring and decay with the progression of the year. The beautiful spring flowers become thorns; the pure white becomes sterile white, and the harmonious music becomes dissonant. Two other image patterns are cyclic: predatory animals and sea and mists; both images by the end of the poem have returned to their exact state at the beginning of the poem. One other image pattern is noncyclic. The six principal image patterns are: predatory animals, sea and mists, flowers, colors, music, and fire. Words make up image patterns, which in isolation serve only descriptive purposes. However, Tennyson uses the same words repeatedly.
throughout the poem. A study of the context in which Tennyson uses certain words shows a pattern where the words take on special meaning.

Tennyson uses the image of predatory animals extensively. He calls uncivilized men from the wasteland beasts, and he specifically compares various characters to wolves, birds of prey, and snakes. Merlin builds Arthur a mighty hall with four zones of sculpture, "And in the lowest beasts are slaying men, / And in the second men are slaying beasts." (HG, ll. 234-4) This image of the beast and beast-like man, man's starting point in the evolutionary process, permeates the *Idylls*, giving the poem unity as Tennyson develops the beast image. Tennyson portrays man first as a beast; he rises to follow King Arthur's ideals, but he slowly sinks back into the beast again. One of the major conflicts in the poem is man constantly striving to subordinate his lower bestial nature.

In Cameliard the beast reigns supreme. Throughout the land "... the beast was ever more and more / But man was less and less." (CA, ll. 10-11) Cameliard is a sterile, brute-ridden wasteland, says Edward Engelberg where the beast "... rooted in the fields, / And wallow'd in the gardens of the King." (CA, ll. 24-4) The beast throughout the *Idylls* and in Tennyson's other poems (e.g. *In Memoriam* CXVIII) represents man's basest nature always conflicting with his higher self. The beast is man's flesh, lustful and passionate, and conflicting with man's higher being: his power to reason and to seek spiritual ideals.

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Edward Engelberg, "The Beast Image in Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*," *EH*, XXII (1956), 287.
Man as a spirit has no place in Cameliard. Man fights the beast living in the wilderness, but often the beast is indistinguishable from man:

And ever and anon the wolf would steal
The children and devour, but now and then,
Her own brood lost or dead, lent her fierce teat
To human suckling; and the children, housed
In her foul den, there at their meat would growl,
And mock their foster-mother on four feet . . .

(CA, 11. 25-30)

Tennyson in the opening lines of the Idylls establishes a barren land devoid of higher man, where the beast and man are one and the same.

Arthur begins civilizing Cameliard. The second mural of Merlin represents this stage, where men begin slaying the beast. But this wasteland breeds "... wolf-like men, / Worse than the wolves . . ." (CA, 11. 32-3) Arthur has come to a land where the inhabitants are "... there between man and beast." (CA, 1. 79) Warren Beck suggests that Tennyson can define idealism only by reflecting on its opposite, for Arthur is a Christ-like figure compared to Cameliard's beasts.

Significantly, the men of the wasteland do not recognize Arthur like themselves. They inquire into his birth, thinking he does not resemble at all the other kings or heads of the land; least of all does he resemble the kings who might be his father. The inhabitants of Cameliard do not know whether Arthur is a bastard or whether God sent him to earth on a great wave. But whatever his origin, they realize he is far above them and they hate him, "For there be those who hate him in their hearts / Call him baseborn . . . since his ways are sweet,

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And theirs are bestial..." (CA, ll. 177-80) Ironically the wolf-like lords of Cameliiard hold Arthur "... less than man," (CA, l. 180) because he is so different from themselves.

Arthur represses the beast when he establishes his Round Table. In "Gareth and Lynette," the beast is outside the kingdom, and although "... many another suppliant came / With noise of ravage wrought by beast and man," (G&L, ll. 429-30) Arthur's kingdom is safe inside. His knights like Gareth must ride to the wasteland to slay the beast. Merlin's third panel on his mural represents this stage of Camelot, where "And on the third are warriors, perfect men." (HG, l. 236) However, Tennyson shows an ominous sign from within, for one of the knights, Sir Kay, when hearing Gareth ask for a quest, groans like a bull. Sir Kay is the first knight to fall from his vows.

In the Geraint books, the beasts are still outside the kingdom, although, says Edward Engelberg, "There is a warning that the pre-Arthurian beast, though for the time driven out, remains a constant threat." Geraint first battles the Sparrow Hawk, who, when defeated, raises himself from his former life which "... had been the wolf's indeed." (G&E, l. 863) Edyrn goes to Arthur's court "Where first as sullen as a beast new caged / And waiting to be treated like a wolf," (G&E, ll. 855-6) he finally emulates the knightly ways. Enid's former suitor LImours, living in the wasteland refrains from animalistic behavior only if the occasion demands restraint: "I call mine own self..."
Traveling farther from Arthur's kingdom into the wild woods, Geraint encounters three wolf-like knights. He finally reaches Earl Doorm's "... realm of lawless turbulence." (G&E, l. 521) His spearmen are "Each growling like a dog ..." (G&E, l. 558) and the people of the area are "Feeding like horses ..." (G&E, l. 605) Mr. Engleberg says of Earl Doorm:

The ruler of this jungle of man-beasts is complete animal. He is a "Bull," with "rolling eyes of prey" whose Passion is transcended by a utilitarian Reason functioning misguidedly to satiate his gluttony: "I compel all creatures to my will."84

With the "Balin and Balan" idyll, one beast from the wasteland, Vivien, is on her way to lodge in Camelot, and the bestial tendencies become more influential inside Arthur's realm. Balin is a beast-like man wanting to replace the rough beast on his shield for some symbol of Arthur's civilizing influence. He wants to stay out of the lawless realm where he dwells "Savage among savage woods ...," (B&B, l. 479) but two creatures from the wasteland turn his good intentions to his death. Balin leaves Camelot to try and control his growing bewilderment after overhearing Lancelot and Guinevere in the garden. Balin meets Garlon, who hisses at him and poisons his thoughts, and stings "... him in his dreams ..." (B&B, l. 378) Then Vivien deals a death blow. Like a bird of prey, whose goal is "... to watch the time and eagle-like / Stoop at thy will on Lancelot and the Queen," (B&B, ll. 527-8) Vivien's lies about Lancelot and Guinevere causes Balin to yell "... unearthlier

84 Ibid., p. 289.
than all shriek of bird or beast," (B&B, l. 536) and to die fighting his brother, "... like brainless bulls." (B&B, l. 568)

The "Merlin and Vivien idyll has a great deal of animal imagery, centering on the evil Vivien, the serpent destroying Arthur's Garden of Eden. King Mark challenges Vivien to bring out the buried bestial qualities in Arthur's knights:

Here are snakes within the grass;
And you methinks, O Vivien, save ye fear
The monkish manhood, and mask of pure
Worn by this court, can stir them till they sting.
(M&V, ll. 32-5)

Vivien scornfully responds, "... There is no being pure." (M&V, l. 50)

She then sets out to prove all men are beasts, especially those disguising themselves as Arthur's knights.

In the "Merlin and Vivien" idyll, Tennyson describes Vivien not only as the temptress serpent, but as a rat, falcon, cat, and worm, all beast images suggesting her as a predatory beast feeding on Camelot. Tennyson makes eight references to her eyes as animal eyes keeping a fixed watch on its prey. She proudly thinks of herself as a rat "... that borest in the dyke / Thy hole by night to let the boundless deep / Down upon far-off cities while they dance." (M&V, ll. 109-11) She fails to tempt Arthur who looks "... upon her blankly ... " (M&V, l. 159) and turns away. Because Arthur will have nothing to do with her, she goes after Merlin, Arthur's chief supporter. Merlin is an easier target because his age and position exclude him from the companionship of all people except Arthur. She reasons if she removes Merlin from the kingdom and obtains the power of his charm, she can easily destroy Camelot, "The
meapest having power upon the highest / And the high purpose broken by
the worm." (M&V, ll. 193-4) So "... Vivien, into Camelot stealing,
lodged / Low in the city ..." (M&V, ll. 62-3) like a stalking cat.
Once inside Arthur's court, she stealthily creeps about, again in the
image of the predatory cat.

Once she directly pursues Merlin, the beast images become mainly
those of the serpent. Merlin flees to Broceliande, and Vivien follows
him. When she catches up with him, she:

Writhed towards him, slipped up his knee, and sat,
Behind his ankle twined her hollow feet
Together, curved an arm about his neck,
Clung like a snake ... (M&V, ll. 237-40)

After she makes a plea for Merlin to tell her his magical charm, "She
ceased, and made her lithe arm round his neck / Tighten, and then drew
back ..." (M&V, ll. 611-2) The most abhorrent serpent imagery occurs
after Merlin angers her calling her a harlot under his breath:

And hearing "harlot" mutter'd twice or thrice,
Leapt from her session on his lap, and stood
Stiff as a viper frozen; loathsome sight,
How from the rosy lips of life and love
Flash'd the bare-grinning skeleton of death!
(M&V, ll. 841-5)

Her final attack is to act coyly and passively; she "... hung her head, /
The snake of gold slid from her hair, the braid / Slipt and uncoiled itself ...
(M&V, ll. 865-7) Thus an untamed beast from Cameliard,
Vivian, burrows a hole in Camelot and exposes the bestial qualities, which
are not buried deep enough to survive temptation.

Tennyson uses beast imagery effectively in "The Holy Grail" idyll.

When the knights return from the Quest, they find the city in decay.
Even the magical animals sculptured on the wall, the unicorn, basilisks, coca-trices, and talbots are splintered and shattered. The illusion of the civilized beast is cracking. Mr. Engelberg comments, "Each of these fabulous animals has lost its power, just as Arthur has now lost his. A return to the beast-ridden order is imminent."

In "Pelleas and Ettarre" Tennyson describes Ettarre, like Vivien, in animal terms. Ettarre is an ant that stings and a snake—both lowly creatures whose bite stings the victim and could cause his death. But more important is the description of Pelleas, the idealistic young knight falling in love with Ettarre. Finding himself deluded in love by a female creature from the wasteland, Pelleas, like Balin, reverts back to the beast. He thinks of himself:

... myself most fool;
Beast too, as lacking human wit—disgraced.

O great and sane and simple race of brutes,
That own no lust because they have no laws.

(P&E, ll. 466-7, 471-2)

Pelleas hisses at Guinevere and leaves Camelot as silence falls upon Arthur's hall, as if all are "Beneath the shadow of some bird of prey."

(P&E, l. 595)

By the time of "The Last Tournament," the animal imagery completes its cycle. Men temporarily slay the beast, but the beast prevails over the warriors, perfect men, the fourth level of men Merlin represents in his sculpture. Only Galahad and Arthur reach this level. Galahad goes

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85Ibid., p. 290.
to the Spiritual City and Arthur is always away from Camelot fighting the heathens. Arthur now fears his knights are slipping back to their "... brute violences," (LT, 1. 124) causing them to "Reel back into the beast, and be no more?" (LT, 1. 125) The two plots of "The Last Tournament" revolving around Arthur and Tristram have the beast image to show how far the knights have fallen from their vows. Arthur's word to Lancelot asking if all is well shrieks "... like birds of prey," (LT, 1. 138) all night in Lancelot's head. Arthur fights the Red Knight who howls, not talks. The Red Knight swears by the "... scorpion-worm that twists in hell / And stings itself to everlasting death."

(LT, 11. 450-1) The courtesies of the Round Table no longer influence Arthur's young knights, who act like a pack of wild animals fighting the Red Knight. Tristram is the prime example of a potentially good warrior whose bestial instinct dominate him. Lancelot skeptically awards Tristram the first prize gems Arthur found in an eagle's nest, "Like a dry bone cast to some hungry hound." (LT, 1. 196) Tristram calls Dagonet a swine, although the fool is the only person seeing the necessity of Arthur's intense idealism. Tristram goes to his lover Isolt, who tells him he still acts like the wild beasts he has been living near. Mark stealing "Catlike thro' his own castle ... " (LT, 1. 514) "Not said, but hiss'd ... " (LT, 1. 615) at his wife, and he kills Tristram with an axe uttering the animalistic grunt of "Mark's way ... " (LT, 1. 749) By "The Last Tournament," the knights have regressed to their evolutionary starting point, and the uncivilized beast of the wasteland gains full control of the court. The cycle completes itself, and Arthur
sees "... and all my realm / Reels back into the beast, and is no more." (PA, ll. 25-6) The beast represents the lowest conscience of man ultimately rejecting any civilizing influence. The beast's ascendency and final victory accounts for the prevailing mood of gloom and despair in the *Idylls of the King*.

While the beast image is certainly the most prevailing animal imagery in the poem, Tennyson shows the gentle sides of some characters by defining them in terms of harmless animals. One of the least harmful creatures is the non-predatory bird. Tennyson describes three characters: Gareth, Enid, and Elaine, by bird imagery. Gareth wants to be like a royal eagle swooping down on all base things, but his mother calls him a harmless wild goose. Bellicent tells her youngest son her dreams of Camelot's glories are only red berries charming the domesticated bird who knows no hardships. When Geraint first comes to Earl Yniol's castle, he hears Enid clearly and sweetly singing like a delicate song bird. Enid, wearing her beautiful dress, tells Geraint she now does not look like a ragged robin. Finally Elaine compares herself to a helpless innocent bird having only one song to sing, her love for Lancelot.

The sea and mist imagery is another cyclic image pattern. Professor Ryals says Tennyson identifies Arthur with the sea of eternity, which makes the sea's intrusion upon his narrow realm important.86 Arthur's influence represents a wave upon his kingdom, and the mist re-

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presents the clouded appearance of reality. The water imagery occurs most frequently in the first and last idylls, dealing with Arthur's birth and death. Merlin explains Arthur's origin, "From the great deep to the great deep he goes." (CA, l. 410) Arthur descends to Camelot "... in the glory of the seas," (CA, l. 399) and the Lady of the Lake presents him with Excalibur. At Arthur's marriage "A voice as of the waters..." (CA, l. 464) blesses the King and his bride. On the gate entering Camelot is a likeness of the Lady of the Lake with water dripping from each hand, "And o'er her breast floated the sacred fish."

(G&L, l. 219) As Arthur nears his death, he fights the Red Knight by the sea, then the battle against his own people ends as:

... the wan wave
Brake in among dead faces, to and fro.
Swaying the helpless hands, up and down
Tumbling the hollow helmets of the fallen,
And shiver'd brands that once fought with Rome,
And rolling far along the gloomy shores
The voice of days old and days to be.

(PA, 11. 129-35)

Arthur returns Excalibur to the water, and he floats away on his funeral barge "Down that long water opening on the deep / Somewhere far off..."

(PA, 11. 461-2)

Tennyson used mist images in the Idylls to designate only the appearance of reality. Gareth initially sees Camelot in a mist, representing the idealized vision he has of life there. In the wild woods, Merlin is wrapped "In that mind-mist..." (M&V, l. 299) concerning his confusion over Vivien. Arthur last observes Guinevere through a blind haze. Guinevere watches her husband depart into the mist. This
mists in "Guinevere" represents Arthur and Guinevere's confusion about one another. In the last battle, "A death-white mist slept over sand and sea," (PA, 1. 95) for the knights do not know whether to accept Modred or Arthur as the true king; and Arthur seems only a phantom king.

Tennyson uses the word "half--" as an adjective sixty-two times in the Idylls. Along with the mist images, Tennyson's repeated use of this word sets the tone in certain idylls, alerting the reader to look for illusions and half-truth in the action. The Gareth idyll uses the word "half--" twelve times signifying many distortions of reality.

Gareth pretends to be a kitchen knave, while Lancelot fights Gareth as a nameless knight. Most important, the feared Knight of Death turns out to be a young boy.87 The combined Geraint idylls uses "half-" twelve times representing Geraint's false ideals about his wife's fidelity.88 The "Merlin and Vivien" idyll centers around her false love for Merlin. Tennyson uses "half-" eleven times to represent this. He repeats a very effective line three times: "Merlin half-believed her true." (M&V, 11. 184, 389, 890) Eight uses of the word in the "Lancelot and Elaine" idyll suggest Elaine's illusion about love and Lancelot's purity as well as Guinevere's false ideas of Lancelot's fidelity to

87 For example, Gawain falls Gareth after a practice joust, "Thou hast half prevail'd against me." (G&L, 1. 30). Once in Camelot, Gareth feels his disguise is a "... half-shadow of a lie," (G&L, 1. 316) but he is "... half beyond himself for ecstasy" (G&L, 1. 514) once Arthur "... half-unwillingly" (G&L, 1. 566) assigns him a quest.

88 For example, Enid's mother smiling but "... half in tears" (MG, 1. 823) says goodbye to Enid and Geraint. Also, Edyrn calls himself "... half a bandit in my lawless hour" (G&E, 1. 794).
her. In "The Last Tournament," the author uses "half-" eight times, designating the lack of any true victor in this idyll.

The flower, color and music images all start out freshly in Camelot's spring, but like the predatory animals and sea and mists, they too have a cyclic pattern. The fresh May flowers of the Gareth idyll turn to brambles and thorns in the Pelleas idyll. The spring flowers represent nature's and human's freshness untested by the parching summer drying man's idealism. Arthur inspires his knights to do "... noble deeds, the flower of all the world." (M&V, l. 411) "... Lancelot past away among the flowers--" (CA, l. 449) in April to bring Guinevere to Arthur. As Lancelot returns with her among the flowers of May, they innocently talk of sports, tilts, and love as they "Rode under groves that look'd a paradise / Of blossom, over sheets of hyacinth." (G, ll. 387-8) However, the hyacinth is the flower of grief. In the Gareth idyll, Gareth goes to Camelot when "... the live green had kindled into flowers." (G&L, l. 182) As Gareth rides to his quest, he sings a song about the dewy flowers that open to the sun, just as he opens to Arthur. Most important in the hopeful Gareth idyll, the abhorrent Black Knight of Death is only a young boy whose face is "Fresh as a flower new-born." (G&L, l. 1374)

89Tennyson uses the line with "half-disdain" (L&E, l. 262--1230) to describe Lancelot.

90For example, Arthur wonders if his knights are only "... half-loyal to command" (LT, l. 623) and the trumpet announcing the mighty tournament blew to ears "... half-awakened ..." (LT, l. 151)

91Significantly, in "The Coming of Arthur," Tennyson says Lancelot and Guinevere ride back among the flowers, but as Guinevere thinks back to when she first sees Lancelot, Tennyson mentions the flowers are hyacinths.
But after the Gareth idyll, optimism quickly fades in the harsh summer heat. Tennyson compares Enid to a faded flower in her wasteland home where thistles sprout, wild flowers cling to the crag, and "... monstrous ivy-stems / Claspt the gray walls with hairy-fibred arms."

(MG, ll. 322-3) This territory is the home of the Sparrow Hawk, Limours, and Earl Doorm, where pure fresh flowers cannot grow. Elsewhere in the poem, Tennyson describes the wasteland outside Arthur's influence as a barren, flowerless place. Pellam's castle is "... grayly draped / With streaming grass... / The battlement overtopp'd with ivy-tods, / A home of bats, in every tower an owl." (B&B, ll. 327-30) Merlin flees to the wild woods of Broceliande. And on the Holy Grail Quest, Percivale, Bors, and Lancelot encounter wastefields. In the "Balin and Balan" idyll, Balin rejoins Arthur's Order, and his joy "... blazed itself in wood-land wealth / Of least, and gayest garlandage of flowers." (B&B, ll. 79-80) At this point in his story, Balin's freshness and optimism is like Gareth's. But with Balin's disillusionment regarding Lancelot and Guinevere, he flees to the wilderness among the forest weeds.

In the "Balin and Balan" idyll, Tennyson introduces for the first time the rose and lily images. As in other Tennysonian poems, (e.g. Maud) the rose represents passion and the lily purity. The Queen walks "... down that range of roses...", (B&B, l. 239) while Lancelot greets her from "The long white walk of lilies..." (B&B, l. 244). In this garden setting, Guinevere tells how the rose is her favorite flower. Lancelot, on the other hand, is in a melancholy mood because of a dream where the maiden Saint in the garden holds a spiritual lily.
whose pure light is too bright for him to view. The rose, representing
Guinevere's passionate nature, contrasts to the lily representing the
pure natures of Enid and Elaine. Earl Doorm tells Enid she is lily-like,
and Elaine is the lily maid of Astolat. By the "Pelleas and Ettarre"
Idyll, the ruinous weeks of the wasteland infiltrate the gardens. In
Ettarre's garden "... roses white and red, and brambles mixt / And
overgrowing them ... " (P&E, ll. 413-4) And Pelleas sings in Ettarre's
garden of the rose he wants without the thorns.

Tennyson associated color imagery closely with the flower imagery.
Four colors—green, black, red, and white—suggest the stage of Arthur's
idealism. Also, red and white imply the moral conditions of some charac-
ters. In Camelot's springtime, nature is clothed in green freshness.
Gareth rides to Camelot as the Hills are "... live-green ... " (G&L,
l. 182) but the darkness of the wasteland starts prevading the Idylls even
in the Gareth chapter, slowly blocking out all pure life. Gareth fights
the fierce Knight of Night and Death who carries a long black horn, a
black banner, and night-black arms, dresses in black, and rides a night-
black horse. In the next Idyll, Geraint encounters Limours riding a
black horse. Pellam, the gray king, encourages Balin's black moods. As
Vivien's temptation of Merlin succeeds, the earth is dark. On the Holy
Grail Quest, Percivale comes to a great black swamp. Pelleas finds
Gawain sleeping with Ettarre in the black of midnight, and he leaves his
audience with the Queen to ride into the dark. At the last tournament,
Arthur finds the prize of the necklace in an oak, which has roots "...
like some black coil of carven snakes." (LT, l. 13) Dagonet accuses
Tristram of harping down "The black king's highway . . . ." (LT, 1.343) while Tristram's lover Isolt swoons in utter darkness at the news of his marriage to the other Isolt. And in the last idyll, as the king, half-dead, stumbles to his dusty barge, "The bare black cliff clang'd around him . . . " (PA, 1.356)

The darkness of the wasteland grows in Camelot because of the dominance of red over white, passion over purity. The rose and lily images illustrate such imagery. Tennyson has two examples of the tragic mixing of these two colors. Elaine is the lily maid of Astolat, but she gives Lancelot a scarlet sleeve embroidered with pearls as her favor for the Diamond Tournament. Her passion for Lancelot ultimately destroys her. Also, a white cloud surrounds the Holy Grail, but the Grail vision dyes everything a rose-red, representing the passion with which men seek the pure cup. This Quest started by passion ends in ruin.

Tennyson uses the red imagery effectively in "The Last Tournament," where purity is only a memory and passion rules men's actions. He uses red imagery for both the Tristram and Arthur plots. Tristram wins the ruby carcanet for his mistress, and then in a "... red dream" (LT, l. 486) imagines how the two Isolts fight over the prize, with his wife declaring to his mistress, "... Look, her hand is red! / ... --her hand is hot / With ill desires . . . " (LT, ll. 411-3) Arthur with his younger, untried knights rides off to fight the Red Knight, who opposes every principle of Arthur. Arthur's knights win, but the fight becomes a "Red pulsing . . . " (LT, l. 479) massacre. "This Satanic counterpart of the Round Table is indeed easily overthrown," Mr. W. MacCallum comments,
"but the victory is worse than a defeat."92

Tennyson develops white imagery more than any other color, and this color follows the atmospheric cycle. The main reason Tennyson does not make any other color take on different connotations is that white can represent either purity or barrenness, while other colors do not lend themselves well to opposite implications. White at Camelot's inception represents innocence and purity, and Tennyson describes the goodness of several characters using the white hand or lily image. But by the end of the cycle, the white represents the sterility and barrenness of the wasteland where Arthur's values have no influence on his people. Arthur is the light coming into the dark wasteland to shine as an example of a perfect man, and Tennyson refers to him as the Sun. He marries Guinevere in stainless white, while "The sacred altar blossom'd white with May." (CA, l. 460) Several times Tennyson uses the phrase "white with May" to describe Camelot's pure spring beginning. Tennyson describes Enid as "... the white and glittering star of morn," (MG, l. 734) and when Geraint first sees her, she looks "... like a blossom vermeil-white." (MG, l. 364) Elaine is the lily maid with the white arms. Tennyson describes Guinevere in three different places as having white hands, but her whiteness represents sterility, for she bears no children. As with red, Tennyson uses white extensively in "The Last Tournament." Arthur holds

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Victorian News Letter, XXII (Fall), 14, citing M. W. Mac Callum, Tennyson's "Idylls of the King" and Arthurian Story from the XVith Century (Glasgow, 1894), p. 399.
the tournament in honor of the child whom Guinevere takes from Arthur, "But coldly acquiescing in her white arms ..." (LT, l. 23) "Dame, damsel, each thro' worship of their Queen," (LT, l. 146) dress in sterile white on the day ironically called the " ... white day of Innocence ..." (LT, l. 218) One of "The twelve small damosels white as Innocence" (LT, l. 291) serves wine from a fountain, " ... but this had run itself / All out like a long life to a sour end," (LT, ll. 286-7) and she hands Dagonet a cup where " ... the draught was mud." (LT, l. 298) Tristram marries the pure Isolt the White, but his lover has a white embrace and a white throat representing a lack of purity for her character. Finally in "Guinevere," the deadly, barren winter arrives, and "The white mist, like a face-cloth to the face, / Clung to the dead earth, and the land was still." (G, ll. 7-8) At the convent, the Queen has only a low light. When Arthur comes to her, " ... with her milk-white arms and shadowy hair / She made her face a darkness from the King." (G, ll. 413-4) The cycle of white is complete. Arthur dies in "The stillness of the dead world's winter dawn," (PA, l. 442) and " ... his face was white / And colorless ..." (PA, ll. 380-1) His purity passes into nature's creeping mist.

Music is another cyclic image pattern. Harmony turns to dissonance to indicate the temporary success and eventual failure of Arthur's ideals. A fairy king and fairy queen build Camelot " ... to the music of their harps," (G&L, l. 250) and "They are building still, seeing the city built / To music, there never built at all, / And therefore built for ever." (G&L, ll. 272-4) At Arthur's marriage, all the knights sing in unison,
and again when Balin rejoins Arthur's Order, the knights sing a "Sweet-voiced . . . " (B&B, l. 83) song of welcome. Balin could once again move "In music with his Order and the King." (B&B, l. 208) Gareth finds Camelot a city from music peals, and inside the court he hears the noise of the knights' arms clashing as they move in and out the hall, " . . . and the sound was good to Gareth's ear." (G&L, l. 305) In the Geraint books, Tennyson makes a contrast between Enid's sweet singing voice and the harsh noises of the town the Sparrow Hawk rules. From this point on, Tennyson associates the dissonant sounds with either disagreeable people from the wasteland or with the growing weakness of Arthur's Order. From the Sparrow Hawk's town comes a noise "As of a broad brook o'er a shingly bed / Brawling, or like a clamor of rooks / At distance, ere they settle down for the night." (MG, ll. 248-50) Geraint says of the town's people, "They take the rustic murmur of their bourg / For the great wave that echoes round the world," (MG, ll. 419-20) and he calls their music a rustic cackle. Balin says his is " . . . an unmelodious name to thee / Balin, 'the Savage' . . . ,) (B&B, ll. 50-1) and he asks Arthur to re-admit him to the Order. In the "Balin and Balan" idyll, the predatory creature from the wasteland, Vivien, attacks Camelot, "But now the wholesome music of the wood / Was dumb'd by one from out the hall of Mark." (B&B, ll. 430-1) Vivien, with her shrill laugh, sings, "It is the little rift within the lute, / That by and by will make the music mute, / And ever widening slowly silence all." (M&V, ll. 389-91) This deathly silence will mark the ruin of Arthur's harmonious Order. In the woods of Broceliande, in the "Merlin and Vivien" idyll, the thunder rolls and
finally bursts into "... stammering cracks and claps," (M&V, 1. 940) as Vivien nears her goal with Merlin's destruction. In the "Lancelot and Elaine" idyll, Gawain's gossip about Lancelot and his new love Elaine buzzes through the court, and after Lancelot leaves Elaine, she shrills, "... Let me die." (I&E, 1. 1019) "The Holy Grail" idyll, like the Geraint books, contains the contrasting sounds of good and evil. The Grail music sounds to Percivale's sister, "... O never harp nor horn, / Nor aught we blow with breath, or touch with hand, / Was like that music as it came." (HG, ll. 113-5) But all knights except Galahad hear only the music of "... the hollow-ringing heavens." (HG, l. 675) When the idealistic Pelleas find Gawain sleeping with Ettaerre, he screams, "Let the fox bark, let the wolf yell! Who yells / Here in the sweet summer night but I--; / I, the poor Pelleas whom she call'd her fool." (P&E, ll. 462-4) Then encountering Lancelot, Pelleas shrieks at him and rides off into the darkness.

Tennyson uses the broken music imagery extensively in "The Last Tournament," for, as Mr. Buckley relates:

By the time of the Last Tournament, the Arthurian harmony has been altogether disrupted, and Dagonet the wise fool may appropriately rebuke Tristram, who has broken the music of his own life, as a source of dissonance.93

When Tristram "... twangled on his harp," (LT, 1. 251) Dagonet refuses to dance to his music, "... I had leifer twenty years / Skip to the broken music of my brains / Then to any broken music thou canst

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Dagonet reproaches Tristram for harping downward and for causing broken music in Camelot with his adultery and disobedience of his vows. Mark shrieks at Tristram, then drives an axe through his head. In Arthur's battle with the Red Knight, the King's young knights cannot hear the King because of their "... echoing yell with yell..." (LT, l. 477)

By the "Guinevere" and "Passing of Arthur" idylls, harmony does not exist in the kingdom, resulting in deathly silence or shrieking screams. When Guinevere flees to the convent at Almesbury, "... the land was still," (G, l. 8) but Gawain's ghost shrills at Arthur in a dream. And the last battle when knights no longer sing in unison but fight each other has:

Shield-breakings, and the clash of brands, the crash
Of battle-axes on shatter'd helms, and shrieks,
........... .................................
And shouts of heathen and the traitor knights,
Oaths, insult, filth, and monstrous blasphemies.
(PA, l. 109-10, 113-4)

Then, "A dead hush fell..." (PA, l. 122) But the music is a cyclic image, and it returns to a starting point of harmony. This harmony now is not earthly; the music becomes the silent music in heaven which Dagonet tells Tristram he could not hear. As Arthur disappears from Bedivere's sight on the funeral barge, the knight hears faint sounds from heaven, "Like the last echo born of a great cry, / Sounds, as if some fair city were one voice / Around a king returning from his wars." (PA, l. 459-61)

One other image pattern is important to a better understanding of the Idylls, but unlike the five other image patterns, the fire imagery
is non-cyclic. Fire represents a smouldering destructive force that the beast-like people from outside Arthur's realm and influence are constantly stirring up. Before Arthur comes, the heathen hordes redden "... the sun with smoke and earth with blood." (CA, l. 37) Leodogran dreams Arthur is a phantom king ruling a land where smoke from fires make a thick haze upon the land. This dream foreshadows the haze and mist in "The Passing of Arthur": Arthur takes Mark's offering of golden cloth and throws it on the smouldering hearth. The most explicit use of fire imagery is in "Geraint and Enid" where the reformed Elyrn returns home from Arthur's court, but Enid is still afraid of the former Sparrow Hawk, for "... In a hallow land, / From which old fires have broken, men may fear / Fresh fire and ruin..." (G&E, ll. 820-2) With the beast from the wasteland, Vivien, inside Camelot, the smouldering fire starts spring-up. Vivien tells her squire:

... this fire of heaven,
This old sun-worship, boy, will rise again,
And beat the Cross to earth, and break the King
And all his table. (B&B, ll. 450-3)

To accomplish this task, Vivien uses slander as one of her weapons and "... let her tongue / Rage like a fire among the noblest names." (M&V, ll. 799-800) Gawain's gossip about Lancelot and Elaine "... ran the tale like fire about the court / Fire in dry stubble a nine-day's wonder flared." (L&E, ll. 729-30) Guinevere, realizing the beasts are waiting for her to publically make a wrong move tells Lancelot, "And if we meet again some evil chance / Will make the smouldering scandal break and blaze." (G, ll. 89-90) When Arthur is his angriest, he berates Guinevere
at the convent for causing the destruction of his Order, "Well it is that no child is born of thee. / The children born of thee are sword and fire, / Red ruin, and the breaking up of laws." (G, ll. 421-2) And in the last battle, Arthur pushes Modred "Back to the sunset bound of Lyonesse-- / A land of old upheaven from the abyss / By fire, to sink into the abyss again." (PA, ll. 81-2)

These six image patterns--animals, sea and mists, flowers, colors and music, and fire, are not the sole devices unifying the Idylls; they cannot stand alone. These six image patterns, along with the cyclic atmosphere and seasonal images, demonstrates a strong internal pattern of unity in Tennyson's Idylls of the King.

Theme is the third device Mr. Buckley says unifies the Idylls. Theme is a basic truth about human behavior, human relationships, or human societies which the author implies through the tone and the interactions of characters in a literary work. In the Idylls, the reader can easily see the theme as the underlying current in other unifying devices. The cyclic pattern of the atmosphere and the six image patterns show clearly the theme Tennyson deals with.

The theme of the Idylls of the King is that while an ideal society is not possible, men need ideals. If men totally reject spiritual and moral values, their uncivilized behavior will bring ruin to their society. Hallam Tennyson quotes his father as saying: "Only under the inspiration of ideals can a man combat the cynical indifference, intellectual selfishness, the sloth of will, and the utilitarian materialism of a transition
Alfred Lord Tennyson went on to say that in the *Idylls* he had hoped to show how the individual, a society, and a nation would collapse who rejects spiritual values. Men need ideals, or some goal to help improve themselves morally and spiritually. Without such goals, man is only a beast. The poet's repeated use of the beast image suggests all people have an innate bestial predisposition which rejects religion and morals. The beast follows his natural inclinations of passion, evil, and all selfish desires. But this type of behavior destroys societies, for beast-like people leading their selfish lives will bring constant conflict, war, and eventual ruin and death to their society. Cameliard is just such a place before Arthur arrives.

Arthur gives the uncivilized people ideals, and he tries to establish an ideal kingdom. But he fails. Tennyson gives many reasons in the *Idylls* why an ideal society is not possible, and Tennyson's development of different reasons for Arthur's failure gives unity to his work. Most important, if a society's ideals are too binding and run contrary to human nature, they are not valid and will fail. Ideals must not so completely stifle a person's freedom or individuality that he becomes lost and bewildered. If a person's sense of identity is taken away, then confusion and eventual cynicism results. The ideals of a society must be applicable to life. Arthur was thus faced with a problem: if

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95 Ibid.
he makes the goals too easily attainable, then they are not set high enough; but if he sets the ideals too high, then confusion and eventual ruin results. Arthur gives his knights goals in their Knightly Code and urges every man to live up to these goals as best he can. But this fails, since the knights see Arthur as the embodiment of the Knightly Code, and they try to emulate the king. Also, Arthur sets the ideals too high for people with bestial tendencies. His knights cannot totally eradicate their former beings and establish a whole new identity patterned after the perfect King.

The second reason the ideal is not possible is if humans try to pattern their lives around a goal of total good, they need some symbol or prop to sustain them in their belief in goodness. But tragedy occurs when a knight chooses a wrong symbol or if someone takes away the prop from the dependent person. Those people in Camelot following the king’s example of goodness are frustrated by their inability to attain Arthur’s stature, but they are not totally destroyed, physically or emotionally. Those people who chose Lancelot and Guinevere as their symbols of goodness, such as Balin and Pelleas, upon finding their whole life built on a false symbol, became uncontrollable and return to the bestial wasteland. Some people need props to help them try and achieve Arthur’s standards. Balin needs his brother Balan, Lancelot needs a pure fair maiden. However, one by one these people lose their props and the dependent people become isolated and destroyed. Balin without his brother

runs to the woods like a savage. Lancelot is so disquieted with his de-
pendence on the Queen that his face bears the marks of his struggle.
Yet, being closest to Arthur in greatness, Lancelot is the only depen-
dent person able to find inner peace and die a holy person. The Holy
Grail Quest results in a diminishing of Arthur's Round Table. And
Pelleas, finding his lady as well as Guinevere untrue, instantly reverts
back to the beast incarnate.

Another reason why potentially ideal societies cannot exist is
that the people within them are affected by their relationships with
other people to the extent that they are not able to live up to their
intended goal of good moral behavior. Three types of relationships thus
affect the people: unbalanced relationships, different goals a man and
woman set, and people bringing their own trouble by taking the true for
false. I discuss unbalanced relationships in Chapter Two. To reiterate
a few: Enid's patience contrasts to Geraint's insane jealousy, Balin
cannot function rationally with Balan, Merlin half-believes the traitorous
Vivien cares for him, Elaine's idealized love for Lancelot contrasts to
his platonic kindness towards her, Pelleas' idealized love for Ettarre
contrasts to her belittling harassment of him, Mark views his wife Isolt
as an object to possess, Guinevere dominates Lancelot, Guinevere scoffs
at Arthur's ideals, and Arthur thinks his wife is helping set a good
example for his people. With so many people involved in unbalanced re-
lationships, many people feel insecure or lonely. This sense of doubt
about themselves and others adversely affects the attainment of Arthur's
goals.
Another type of unbalanced relationship results from a conflict between the goals a man and a woman want to attain. Merlin states this problem, "Man dreams of fame while woman wakes to love." (M&V, l. 458)

With women dreaming of love while men dream of righting the wrongs of the world, conflict results. In the Idylls' publication in 1859, entitled "The True and the False: Four Idylls of the King", Tennyson shows how the influence of a woman adversely affects a man. The passionate Guinevere, the deceitful Vivien, as well as the course Etterre harm the men living them.

The only time the author steps from behind his mask to speak directly to the reader is in the "Geraint and Enid" idyll. Tennyson says:

O purblind race of miserable men,
How many among us at this very hour
Do forge a lifelong trouble for ourselves,
By taking true for false, or false for true;
Here, thro' the feeble twilight of this world
Groping, how many, until we pass and reach
That other where we see as we are seen!

(G&E, ll. 1-7)

By misjudging people around them, many people cause their own moral demise. These victims are people placing too much reliance on their mistaken idea of another person. When they find their supposed reality only an illusion, they are unable to be of any good to themselves or Arthur. A happy exception to this situation is Geraint, whose mistaken notion of Enid's fidelity nearly ruins their marriage. But this story occurs in the beginning of the Idylls and the "Geraint and Enid" idyll is the last one to end happily. Balin's worship of Guinevere and Lance-lot indirectly causes his death. Merlin's half-belief in Vivien's love
causes Arthur to lose his chief advisor. Pelleas' blind love for Ettarre causes a complete personality change when he finally sees her true character. And most important, Guinevere's feeling that Arthur is cold and does not love her leads to her liaison with Lancelot.

Tennyson develops and reworks the theme of the *Idylls of the King* and all its aspects in each idyll. The idea of a potentially ideal society failing because of its individual members' refusal to adhere to its moral and spiritual values is the theme of the *Idylls*. Tennyson skillfully uses this theme in different ways in different idylls. The atmosphere shows the moral condition of Camelot in each idyll, and the cyclic imagery shows how far men have slipped from their vows they made at Camelot's inception. Together, the theme, imagery, and atmosphere justify the inclusion of each idyll and give the poem enriched meaning as Tennyson develops the three unifying forces simultaneously in each idyll.
CHAPTER FIVE

The issue this paper deals with is: did Alfred Lord Tennyson in his poem the *Idylls of the King* intentionally structure his work so that the twelve separate poems are tightly organized, or did he write twelve separate poems about the Arthurian legend and only incidentally or casually try to link the idylls together? The fifty-six year time span between the publication in 1832 of his first Arthurian story, "The Lady of Shallot," and the publication of the *Idylls* for the first time in their entirety in 1888 certainly gives validity to many critics' claim that the *Idylls* are not a unified entity. Tennyson's sporadic writing of this work over such a long period of time while he was working on other poems, undergoing great changes in his personal life, and maturing as a poet, seemingly could not produce a unified work. The reader can easily see the difference in style and degrees of complexity of thought when comparing the early idylls with the idylls he wrote in his later years. For example, his story of Elaine (from "The Lady of Shallot") developed in "Lancelot and Elaine" is told straightforwardly with only one flashback and with no subtlety or complexity of character development, the flow of action, or the images. In contrast to this idyll are two idylls produced with the benefit of Tennyson's many years of development as a poet, "The Last Tournament," and "Balin and Balan". In the former, Tennyson skillfully manipulates and interweaves several plots and uses seasonal, musical, and color images very effectively to subtly reinforce the action in the different parallel plots. The "Balin and Balan" idyll was the last one Tennyson wrote. In this idyll he develops a double self, Balin and Balan,
who represent the conscious and unconscious portions of a person's personality. Balin is a very complex character, and his development as a character represents many years of maturity of thought and style of Tennyson. So viewing the Idylls from a stylistic analysis, the separate poems are not similar; and Tennyson's sporadic writing of them over fifty-six years is evident.

Other reasons besides style give critics and readers reason to question the Idylls' unity. There is no main character. In fact, there is an overabundance of characters, fifty-eight to be exact, who appear throughout the Idylls. Tennyson develops twelve major characters well, and sometimes these major characters become minor characters in other idylls. The Idylls of the King does not tell the story of just King Arthur, or even of the King and his Round Table. Tennyson also writes about the women in Camelot. His twelve separate poems comprise an anthology of stories about different facets of life in King Arthur's Camelot. There is not one main character, and if readers view the Idylls only as a story of Arthur, Lancelot, and Guinevere, the traditional main characters of the story, they will not find a unified story.

Even a careful look at the Idylls in terms of its broad unifying devices, warrants the opinion that the Idylls are not a unified work. The plot of the story is rather hard to distinguish. Tennyson's story does not follow a few specific characters and develop them throughout the story as many stories do. Tennyson develops a character in one idyll and then, with the exception of Arthur, Lancelot, and Guinevere, drops them and goes on to another character in the next idyll. The plot concerns
Camelot and specifically why Arthur's kingdom falls, but this still is not a tight organization for the work. Several broad issues—the theme and a study of institutions—help give the poem unity. The theme is related to the plot: the cause of failure of an ideal society. Each idyll demonstrates a reason why Camelot falls under Arthur's leadership. A study of two institutions—marriage and the Knightly Code—can be found in many of the idylls. But again, this is a big area which Tennyson specifically develops in some idylls, superficially deals with it in other idylls, and even excludes in still other idylls. For example, Tennyson studies the effect of the Knightly Code on a young man in "Gareth and Lynette" but there is no discussion of marriage and its influence on Gareth. Obviously more than one element unifies this long poem, but a study of its main characters, plot, theme, and even the influence of two institutions on the characters give valid support to the claim that Tennyson wrote his twelve separate poems over such an extended period of time that he could only superficially unify the twelve poems with broad general devices, but he failed to achieve a tight unity.

However, if a reader or critic pays close attention to the details in the individual idylls, it becomes very obvious that the poet very carefully links his poems together in two different ways. Even a casual study of any of Tennyson's good poems, e.g. "Mariana," "Oenone," and "The Two Voices," demonstrates that Tennyson is very careful with his choice of words and details so that his poem has a very tight structure. In his Idylls, Tennyson is faced with the problem of how he can unify twelve idylls he has produced over his life as a poet. Devices such as plot
and theme cannot tightly unify these separate poems. It would seem obvious then that Tennyson would link together the twelve idylls with a means he had successfully used throughout his life as a poet, and that means is carefully working the details in the poem to produce a unified work. This is how Tennyson very deliberately and intentionally linked together the twelve separate poems in his *Idylls of the King*.

Tennyson's careful working of the details in two separate areas—the elaborate system of character function and character types together with his cyclic patterns of images and atmosphere—gives great internal unity to the *Idylls of the King*. And, obviously, these devices are deliberate by Tennyson and not an accidental byproduct of twelve stories dealing with the same subject. Tennyson takes fifty-eight characters and categorizes them according to whether they help build or destroy Arthur's kingdom. Then, the poet further distinguishes the characters as to their perceptiveness or lack of it. These characters in the individual idylls then function to help or destroy Camelot, and their success shows the initial strength then growing weakness of Arthur's kingdom. Also, Tennyson sets up an elaborate system of similar and contrasting characters, and he puts the character in a special place in the story according to his or her function. For example, the story of Gareth, a young idealist, is the first story of "The Round Table". Gareth shows how well everything is going for Arthur, and the story of the young knight end happily. Tennyson develops another young idealist, Pelleas, but Tennyson introduces him near the end of the story. Pelleas' function is to show how a young idealist cannot survive in the crumbling ruins of
Arthur's Camelot. Tennyson's elaborate system of characters provides strong internal unity.

An even tighter unifying device is Tennyson's use of specific images throughout the work. He uses five cyclic image patterns—predatory animals, flowers, colors, music, and sea and mist—to unify the twelve separate poems. It seems valid to assume from the evidence in the poem that once Tennyson had written his twelve poems on the Arthurian legend, he carefully reworked each poem to include specific details which would deliberately link his poems together. Since he was dealing with the rise and fall of a potentially ideal society, he structures the society's progress to fit nature's cyclic pattern. Then he worked in five separate image patterns which also followed a cyclic pattern. In addition, the mood or atmosphere of each idyll would correspond to the progression of the cyclic pattern. Thus at the beginning of the poem, "The Coming of Arthur," when Arthur's kingdom first begins, the season is spring, all image patterns are at their starting point, and the atmosphere is hopeful and optimistic. With the society's decline and final destruction, the last idyll, "The Passing of Arthur," is set in the winter and the image patterns have progressed from good to bad; but like nature, everything is ready for a renewal of life as another year begins. The atmosphere which has progressed from optimistic to skeptical to destructive also ends on an optimistic note as a new year begins. Tennyson succeeds in deliberately linking together twelve separate poems in the Idylls of the King through his careful choice of details with the many characters, their functions, their similarities and differences, and
through his development of a cyclic pattern of images and atmosphere.

One question remains: of what value is a study of this king? For one thing, it demonstrates that Tennyson is a very skillful poet. He is able to take successfully twelve separate poems written over a fifty-six year time span and carefully link them together through a careful working of the details. Tennyson employs a new form to fit his purposes. He does not use the traditional epic or idyll, but he combines the two and tells many different stories about life in Camelot. He greatly alters his primary source, Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* and gives a much more interesting and perceptive view of life in Camelot than Malory does. Malory relates the stories of Tristram and Lancelot, and *Le Morte D'Arthur* is primarily an adventure story. Tennyson, on the other hand, uses the adventures of several knights to show why men cannot create and then sustain an ideal society. Tennyson goes far beyond his sources and creates a new type of literary form, an epyllion or epic idyll,97 in doing so.

Another reason this study is useful is that often a reader will study a work of literature, be it a poem, short story, play, or novel, and on only a first inspection decide if the works is written well or poorly. An opinion as to a work's worth can be greatly influenced by the prevailing mood of the critics concerning the author at a particular time. Thus if a reader around the turn of the century picked up the *Idylls of

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97This is Clyde de L. Rylas' term for Tennyson's new art form, from the book, *From the Great Deep*, p. 18.
the King and read it for a story about Arthur and his knights, with the
pronouncements by Swinburne and George Meredith against the work, a
reader could easily dismiss Tennyson's great work as a failure. This is
to say that critics do not always know everything about literature, and
their judgments are not always correct. Also, most pieces of any type
of literature deserve more than one careful look at a particular work for
its own worth before a pronouncement of praise or doom is given by the
reader. Many authors tell good stories in their respective works and at-
tract an audience because their work is unusual. However, neither device
is an indication that the work is structurally good. Only a careful
scrutiny by the alert reader can determine the worth of a work.

Thus, the Idylls of the King, for one thing, tells a good story.
Tennyson very poignantly relates the stories of Balin, Lancelot, Pelleas,
and Arthur with Guinevere. Tennyson also uses with great success several
devices giving his poem great structural unity, so that his poem succeeds
on two counts: it is well written and it tells a good story. Many other
good works of art have been overlooked by readers because critics steer
them away from them. I hope that this paper proves that often good works
of art such as the Idylls of the King are underrated by critics who do
not carefully examine the entire work. The success of a work of art must
be determined by a reader who judges a work for its own value and who
carefully takes the time to examine its internal structure. Only after
a reader or critic has carefully examined a work a few times is he then
entitled to voice a valid opinion of the work. In conclusion, I have
thoroughly examined Tennyson's Idylls of the King. I find unity lacking
among the individual poems where the author works with large general ideas, such as the theme, plot, and study of institutions. However, looking at the internal unity Tennyson achieved through his diligent working of the characters and the cyclic patterns of seasons, mood, and images combined with his telling of a good story, I find Tennyson's Idylls of the King an overwhelming success.
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<table>
<thead>
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<th>PERCEPTIVE (Realists)</th>
<th>BUILDERS</th>
<th>DESTROYERS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Geraint</td>
<td>Balin</td>
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<td>Enid (Perceptive and an idealist)</td>
<td>Elaine</td>
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</table>
SIMILAR CHARACTERS

Bors ( )
Percivale) -- Arthur
Galahad ( )

Geraint and Lynette
Tristram and Iseult, Lancelot and Guinevere
Ettarre and Edyn
Bors and Elaine
Pelleas, Balin, Geraint, Lancelot
Pelleas and Elaine
Enid and Elaine
Iseult and Guinevere
Elaine and Gareth
Lynette and Guinevere
Iseult and Bedivere
Ettarre and Lynette
Mark, Modred, and Vivien

CONTRASTING CHARACTERS

Pelleas and Gareth
Guinevere and Arthur, Geraint and Enid
Balin and Balan
Arthur and Mark
Elaine and Ettarre
Elaine and Guinevere
Gawain and Pelleas
Gareth and Sir Kay

Pelleas and Etta, Gareth and Lynette

Gareth and Lynette, Geraint and Enid