CHAPTER V

Tennyson:

A Study in Treatment (I)
Tennyson's main source of the Arthurian cycle was Sir Thomas Malory and he openly acknowledged his debt to him. His other sources were Lady Charlotte Guest's translation of *Mabinogion*, Celtic folklore, Welsh legends and Chrétien de Troyes' *Eric*.\(^1\) Besides these, in the 1840's, after Tennyson had decided to base his major work of art on Arthur, he undertook a long journey to Wales to acquaint himself at first hand with the prevailing tradition of King Arthur and his Round Table amongst people. 'After this my father began to study the epical King Arthur in earnest. He had travelled in Wales, and meditated a tour in Cornwall. He thought, read, talked about King Arthur.'\(^2\) He made 'autumnal tours to

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1 *Memoir*, ii, p. 121.  
Glastonbury, Salisbury, Amesbury and the New Forest in search of suitable material and impressions. He had read and re-read Mallory, Geoffrey of Monmouth, Wace, Layamon, Nennius and Lady Charlotte Guest's translation of the Welsh Mabinogion, until there was not an episode of the old myths and lays with which he was not familiar. 3

Some people say that Tennyson in his Idylls of the King has just rendered Malory's prose in mellifluous verse. This is a cruel disparagement of Tennyson's art, because Tennyson leaves a clear impact of his thought and personality on the characters and incidents of the old legend. He recreates them as skilfully as Shakespeare recreated his characters. The old legends provide him with appropriate figures and symbols to voice his own views on the psychological, social and religious problems of his age. Following the pattern set by Spenser, Tennyson casts King Arthur in the image of high morality, and adapts the mythical tales to suit the refined sensibilities, sharp intellect and defined ethical values of the cultivated English society of his own times. In order to serve his own purposes, the poet makes necessary changes in the style, setting and characters of the tales. Though Tennyson maintains some of the accessories of romance

such as the fay haunted forest of Broceliande, the agonising wastelands of 'sand and thorn', and 'black swamp', the wayside chapels and hermits —

... and where the vale
Was lowest, found a chapel, and thereby
A holy hermit in a hermitage, —

fantastic dreams and visions and of course the knights and their gallant errands, he drops out miracles, sorcery and wizardry. The roles played by fays have been omitted, shortened or allegorised. The enchantresses of old have been transformed into 'Hope', 'Charity' and 'Love'. Merlin who personifies wisdom rather than empirical knowledge is shorn of his miraculous powers and his role in the story has been reduced to insignificance. Similarly, though his knights don medieval costumes and are engaged in medieval pursuits, they think, talk, argue and behave in a strikingly modern fashion. It was, in a way, essential to 'remodel models' to make them plausible and effective vehicles for the transmission of the thoughts of the poet; but it also laid him open to the charge of "'fluting' about unreal figures in an unreal world."
As to the style, the tales of Arthur are heterogeneous in nature and action. If the final battle of King Arthur is of epical magnitude, the stories of Merlin and Vivien and of the Holy Grail clearly have allegoric overtones; and the story of Lancelot and Elaine belongs to the domain of pure romance. Like all great poets, in The Idylls of the King, Tennyson draws on all the traditional forms but creates a new genre of his own which is at once epic and lyric; narrative and drama; tragedy and romance.

Since part of the object of this study is to consider in detail Tennyson's treatment of Arthurian legends which are all inextricably interwoven and intermingled, it is essential for the sake of clarity to classify them and to deal with each section separately.

1. King Arthur.
2. Lancelot and Queen Guinevere.
3. Tristram and Iseult.
5. The Holy Grail.
6. Other Arthurian characters and minor legends.
KING ARTHUR.

Just as King Arthur is the pivot of the Arthurian cycle of romance, he is the hero of The Idylls of the Kings, the central figure whose presence unites the otherwise separate tales. The ten idylls which depict the rise and fall of the Round Table are framed on one end by The Coming of Arthur and on the other by The Passing of Arthur.

As to Tennyson's concept of King Arthur, it is not quite consistent and it is interesting to study how it evolved to its final shape in 1869 with the publication of his main idylls of King Arthur, namely, Coming of Arthur and Passing of Arthur after more than three decades of serious thought.

In an original manuscript written in 1833, Tennyson identified King Arthur with 'Religious Faith'; Modred with 'sceptical understanding'; Merlin with 'science'; the Round Table with 'liberal institutions'; and two Guineveres with 'prim. Christianity', and 'Roman Catholicism'. The poem, fortunately, never saw the light of the day, perhaps because the poet was far too young - barely twenty-three - to sustain a long drawn allegory and lead it to its logical end.

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9 Memoir, ii, p. 123.
His second poem *Morte D' Arthur*, was composed soon after the death of his friend, Arthur Hallam, and was, perhaps, suggested to him by his friend's very name — 'Arthur, a figure of mythic nobility and now an idealization, we may suppose of the other and more immediate Arthur'.\textsuperscript{10} The poem furnishes a clear correlative to the poet's thoughts.\textsuperscript{11} Sir Bedivere, left alone, certainly voices the loneliness of Tennyson's heart:

\begin{quote}
'But now the whole Round Table is dissolved
Which was an image of the mighty world;
And I, the last, go forth companionless,
And the days darken round me, and the years,
Among new men, strange faces, other minds.'\textsuperscript{12}
\end{quote}

 Further, the dead Arthur Hallam is exalted to the stature of Jesus Christ for he loved his fellowmen as Jesus did; thus King Arthur subtly suggests Jesus who inspired in men faith in Christianity as Arthur of old inspired love for the ideals of chivalry and courtesy. Both are immortal because after their death, both are resurrected. They depart only to come back again on a later day. The analogy between Christ and King Arthur is clearly visible in *The Idylls of the King* too. As God created man in his own image, the King recreated the knights in his own image. 'The King will follow Christ and we the King'.\textsuperscript{13} Arthur's coming is patterned

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{10} Buckley, op. cit., p. 65.
  \item \textsuperscript{11} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{12} The Poems, *Morte D' Arthur*, 11. 234-38.
  \item \textsuperscript{13} Ibid., CA, 1. 499.
\end{itemize}
on the incarnation and his passing on the passion. He combines in his nature the sternness of the Great Judge as also His compassion. King Arthur is 'the ideal manhood closed in man' an epitome of perfect chivalric virtues, in fact perfection itself. The poet had some medieval warrant for holding this conception. Joseph of Exeter wrote:

> The old world knows not his peer, nor will the future show us his equal; he alone towers over other kings, better than the past ones and greater than those that are to be. 

Allegorically speaking, King Arthur is the 'soul'; the 'conscience'; the highest 'moral ideal'. "By Arthur I always meant the soul and by the Round Table, the passions and capacities of man." The tale of King Arthur is one '...shadowing Sense at war with soul' and Tennyson strongly felt 'that only under the inspiration of ideals and with his 'sword bathed in heaven' can a man combat cynical indifference, the intellectual selfishness, the sloth of will, the ultimate materialism.'

The use of an established tradition imposes its own discipline on the poet. When Tennyson declared that his

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14 J.D. Rosenberg, op.cit., p. 86.
15 The Poems, To the Queen, 1. 38.
17 Memoir, ii, pp. 127, 129-130.
18 The Poems, To the Queen, 1. 37.
19 Memoir, ii, p. 129.
Arthur was, 'in short, mystic and no mere British Prince', a lot of clamour was raised. Swinburne and others objected that such a conception had done violence to the Arthurian sources.

Tennyson's story of King Arthur is mainly taken from Malory. The birth and death of King Arthur have been traditionally wrapped in mystery. Some said he had dropped from Heaven and on the crest of a mighty wave was washed down the feet of mazm Merlin who reared him and put him on the throne:

... all the wave was in a flame
And down the wave and in the flame was born
A naked babe, and rode to Merlin's feet
Who stoopst and caught the babe, and cried 'The King!
Here is an heir for Utter!'  

Others believed that he was the legal heir to the throne, being born out of wedlock to Ygerne and King Uther. Malory gives credence to the latter theory and gives an elaborate account of his birth and crowning. Tennyson also lightly touches these tales but, unlike Malory, does not commit himself to any one of them because his object is not to tell us of the parentage of the legendary Arthur but to focus on how people look with eyes of suspicion on the origin and

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20 From a letter to Drummond Rawnsley: Harvard Tennyson Papers, (MS Eng. 952, 2, 11).
21 Swinburne, Under the Microscope, p. 35.
22 The Poems, CA, 11. 381-85.
23 Malory, I, (iii-v).
existence of Spirit or ideal which Arthur of the Idylls symbolises. Those who look only with the eyes of sense perceive no spirit and regard it baseborn.

. . . 'Away with him!
No king of ours! a son of Gorlois he
Or else the child of Anton, and no king
Or else baseborn.'24

There are others like Lancelot and Gareth who accept Arthur as proved by his works.

'Who should be king save him who makes us free?'25—

asks Gareth of his mother. Lancelot assures Arthur when the latter asked him, "Thou dost not doubt me king?"26—

". . . the fire of God
Descends upon thee in the battle-field;
I know thee for my king!"27

People like Bellicent intuitively perceive the truth about an ideal

'. . . I hear
A cry from out the dawning of my life, . . .
'O that ye had some brother, pretty one,
To guard thee on the rough ways of the world.'28

but to a Leodogran, it must be revealed in a vision before he is convinced.

24 The Poems, CA, 11. 290-3.
25 Ibid., GL, 1. 136.
26 Ibid., CA, 1. 125.
27 Ibid., CA, 11. 127-29.
28 Ibid., CA, 11. 331-34.
Till with a wink his dream was changed, the haze
descended, and the solid earth became
as nothing, but the King stood out in Heaven,
crowned, and Leodogran awoke and sent...
back to the court of Arthur answering yea.

In order to drive home his parable of King Arthur, Tennyson
breaks the biological cycle further by linking Arthur's
birth and death to the symbolic seasons. The Coming of Arthur
is on the night of the New Year;

And that same night, the night of the new year... all before his time

... Was Arthur born,

when he weds the world is 'white with May'; The Last
Tournament is held amidst the autumnal thunder —

And ever the wind blew, and yellowing leaf
And gloom and gleam, and shower and shorn plume
Went down it.

and Arthur passes away at midnight in mid winter. Arthur
of the Idylls has a dual nature — he exists in time, yet
transcends it.

29 The Poems, CA, 11. 440-45.
30 Ibid., CA, 11. 208-211.
31 Ibid., CA, 1. 460.
32 Ibid., LT, 11. 154-56.
King Arthur, the spirit, must marry Guinevere, the heart or body to fulfill his purpose of life, namely, the establishment of an ideal society based on spiritual values. To Tennyson's mind, the significance of an ideal lay in its relevance to life and mankind, in its teaching us to work 'in the allotted field',33 with greater efficacy. Spirit must mix with life, thought must embrace fact, and therefore, King Arthur asks for the hand of Guinevere whom he saw standing by the castle wall on his way to the battle. His reason is:

"... for saving I be joined
To her that is fairest under heaven,
I seem as nothing in the mighty world,
And cannot will my will nor work my work
Wholly, nor make myself in my own realm
Victor and lord. But were I joined with her
Then might we live together as one life,
And reigning with one will in everything,
Have power on his dark land to lighten it,
And power on this world to make it live."34

King Arthur's request for the hand of his daughter throws the girl's father into a serious dilemma.

" - How should I that am a king,
However much he help me at my need,
Give my one daughter saving to a king,
And a king's son?"35

33 The Poems, HG, 1. 904.
34 Ibid., CA, 11. 84-94.
The problem is ultimately resolved and the chief of Arthur's knights, Lancelot, is sent to escort the king's bride to London where, on a glittering May morning they are married.

If we compare these facts with Malory's version of King Arthur's wedding, we notice that Tennyson departs considerably from his source. In Malory, Arthur sends his offer to Leodegrain through Merlin who forewarns him that 'Lancelot should love her, and she him again';\(^{36}\) and so 'Guenever was not wholesome for him to take to wife';\(^{37}\) Besides, Leodegrain instead of being thrown into a fit of cogitation as to whether he should give away his daughter or not, jumps at the offer. 'That is to me said King Leodegrance, the best tidings that ever I heard, that so worthy a king of powres and noblesse will wed my daughter';\(^{38}\) and he 'delivered his daughter Guenever unto Merlin, and the Table Round, with the hundred knights'.\(^{39}\) The need for this deviation was apparently dictated by Tennyson's allegory.

The soul is joined to the body. King Arthur sets up his Round Table which is 'an image of the mighty world',\(^{40}\) the cosmos created by spirit. His noble brotherhood of knights

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36 Malory, III(1), p. 64.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
40 The Poems, PA, l. 403.
... sworn to vows
Of utter hardihood, utter gentleness,
And, loving, utter faithfulness in love,
And uttermost obedience to the King. 41

embark upon a spring-cleaning of the world cluttered with
'wild dog, and wolf and boar and bear'; 42 with sloth and
sensuality; with dishonesty and deceit. 'Every morning
brought a noble chance and every chance brought out a noble
knight.' 43

But this pure bliss is short-lived. Spiritual joined with
the temporal gains the power of working in the temporal but
at the same time it is weakened due to its alliance with
imperfect matter. Guinevere's adulterous love for Lancelot
leads the rebellion of Flesh against Spirit. It results in
spiritual degradation in men and discord and disorder within
the kingdom at a time when the heathen hordes are rallying
round the northern borders. There are other disruptive
forces at work too. Treachery and dishonesty are rampant.
The evil influence of King Mark has permeated down to the
roots of the Round Table through Vivien and Tristram. Wisdom
symbolised by Merlin has been usurped. The knights have
become slothful so that the call of duty is neglected, and
escape from reality is sought in chasing the 'wandering
fires'. 44 The vows of loyalty and obedience have been

41 The Poems, GL, 11. 541-44.
42 Ibid., CA, 1. 23.
43 Ibid., PA, 11. 398-99.
44 Ibid., HG, 1. 319.
forgotten—'The vows! O ay—the wholesome madness of an hour'.

King Arthur, the Spirit, however, remains untainted but he is a lonely dejected man in whose heart 'pain was lord'.

The treacherous Modred is active. Crouching low, he waits for an opportunity to bring to naught the mighty efforts of the King and defeat his purpose of life. Here it is noteworthy that Tennyson does not follow Malory in making Modred the incestuous offspring of King Arthur. Spirit is above all sins or temptations. King Arthur does not fall because of any fault in him. The 'flaw lies in the human seed that also breeds Mark and Modred, and in the mortality that erodes even as it gives preciousness to human aspirations'.

Queen Guinevere when her guilt is exposed publicly, flees to a nunnery at Almesbury, and Lancelot takes shelter in Joyous Guarde. Under 'a deathwhite mist' of confusion and despair, King Arthur marches to the 'last, dim, weird battle of the west' where in killing Modred, he suffers a mortal wound. Knowing that his end is near, he prepares to depart. First he surrenders his Excalibur, the symbol of

45 The Poems, LT, 1. 670.
46 Ibid., LT, 1. 485.
47 J.D. Rosenberg, The Fall of Camelot, p. 132.
48 The Poems, PA, 1. 95.
49 Ibid., PA, 1. 94.
his kingship, through Bedivere, his sole surviving knight. Then, upon his shoulder he is carried to the 'dusky barge' and is received by 'Black-stoled, black-hooded — Three Queens' amidst loud lamentations and taken to Avalion:

Wherefalls not hail, or rain, or any snow, Nor ever wind blows loudly; but it lies Deep meadowed, happy, fair with orchard lawns And bowry hollows crowned with summer sea.

The world created out of chaos by Arthur is succeeded by a new chaos. But the very fact that the life of Arthur began with a solemn arming and ended with a solemn disarming affirms a positive pattern which may not be clear to Arthur but is to those who armed him. It is the completion of a cycle whose meaning is clear only to the Unseen. The spiritual manifests itself through a series of shifting phenomena. 'God fulfils himself in many ways, lest one good custom should corrupt the world.' The poem, Idylls of the King is intended by Tennyson to serve 'as an antidote to the positivistic spirit that had invaded nineteenth century poetry.' He wants to warn his people that a similar doom

50 The Poems, PA, 1. 361.
51 Ibid., PA, 11. 365-66.
52 Ibid., PA, 11. 428-31.
54 The Poems, PA, 11. 409-10.
55 Buckley, op.cit., p. 192.
might overtake England that destroyed the goodly Order of Arthur. In his address to the Queen at the end of the poem, he enumerates the forces active in society that may lead it to its destruction

'Waivering of every vane with every wind,
And wordy trucklings to the transient hour,
And fierce of careless looseness of the faith,
And softness breeding scorn of simple life,
Or Cowardice, the child of lust for gold,
Or labour with a groan and not a voice,
Or Art with poisonous honey stol'n from France,
And that which knows, but careful for itself,
And that which knows not, ruling that which knows
To its own harm.' 56

LANCELOT and GUINEVERE.

Queen Guinevere 'the pearl of beauty' is the wife of King Arthur but the beloved of Lancelot; Lancelot, 'the flower of bravery', is 'the right arm' of King Arthur but also the usurper of his bed. This theme of the adulterous love of Lancelot and Guinevere is most vital to the scheme of Tennyson's morality in The Idylls of the King because it is at the root of the downfall of the divine order established by King Arthur.

56 The Poems, To the Queen, 11. 50-59.
The love of Lancelot and Queen Guinevere is traditional and can be traced back to Chretien's Lancelot or Malory's Le Morte D'Arthur, but, the consequences that flow from this unholy alliance are not essentially the same as Tennyson has drawn. Tennyson always considered sensual love as an evil in itself that breeds untold further evils in both the individual and society. By 'Sense at war with Soul', Steane writes, Tennyson meant, 'Sexuality at war with Christian principle'. We may not agree with the statement wholly, but it cannot be denied that Tennyson was certainly of the view that the erotic love between Queen Guinevere and Lancelot was the chief cause, if not the sole one, of the fall of Arthur's kingdom. The Idylls itself and the notes and comments made by Tennyson support this view.

Lancelot, the 'knight peerless' who is ever 'the first in tournament' is the warrior 'whom he (Arthur) loved and honoured most'. He is an old bachelor who never cherished a maiden's love but is devoted to Queen Guinevere from the day he set his eyes on her and the Queen too responds to his love in full measure. In Chretien's Lancelot

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58 The Poems, LE, l. 1273.
59 Ibid., GL, l. 485.
60 Ibid., CA, l. 447.
also, the hero falls in a love trance the moment he beholds Queen Guinevere and in Malory's *Morte D'Arthur*, many a time he comes to her rescue and many a time saves her from being burnt at the stake at the order of King Arthur who himself, later on, felt grateful to Lancelot for saving his Queen. 61 In feudal societies of the past, it was not uncommon to find such a kind of relationship, nor was it tabooed. In fact, as expounded by Andreas Capellanus, a French Chaplain, the code of chivalric love required that the object of such love must be some other person's wife and not one's own. But as it ran counter to Christian morality, it did not enjoy popular support and was confined to the upper classes. But Tennyson, looking at it from the eyes of a Victorian, condemns it as sinful and holds the two lovers responsible for the moral degeneration of the Round Table. Malory does not use a single word or expression of reproach or disapproval for the Queen throughout. Besides, Lancelot, time and again swears by her honour. "I will fight for the queen, that she is a true lady unto her lord" 62 and King Arthur also knows of this extra marital relationship of his wife but chooses to keep quiet as a measure of political expediency. 'For, as the French book saith, the king was full loth thereto that any noise should be upon Sir Lancelot and his queen; for the king had a deeming, but he would not hear it.

61 Malory, XX (xi), p. 461.
for Sir Lancelot had done so much for him and for the queen so many times, that wit ye well, the king loved him passing well.'

King Arthur is compelled to take up arms against Lancelot by Gawain whose two brothers, Sir Gareth and Sir Gaheris had been unwittingly slain by Lancelot. Otherwise, in compliance with the order of the church, King Arthur had already taken back his wife from Lancelot and made peace with him. Thus Lancelot had social and religious sanctions for cherishing the love of Queen Guinevere. Since he was extremely brave, loyal, courteous and noble, he was held in high esteem in a world where might of limb and largeness of heart were the sole criteria of a man's greatness. In fact his character sketched by Malory is so lovable that Tennyson could not remain untouched. Hallam writes, 'My father loved his own great imaginative knight, the Lancelot of the Idylls.'

Tennyson has, therefore, delineated his character with such great care that in spite of his one lapse, he retains our love and admiration.

King Arthur forfeits our sympathies because he is too perfect.

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63 Malory, XX (ii), p. 452.
64 Cited by Christopher Ricks ed. The Poems of Tennyson, p. 1660.
Arthur, my lord, Arthur, the faultless King,
That passionate perfection, my good lord—
But who can gaze upon the Sun in heaven?65

But Lancelot is one of us; of the earth, earthy. He is
human to the core in his weaknesses and strength, in his
earnest selfprobing and deep agonising mental strifes—

For what am I? what profits me my name
Of greatest knight? I fought for it, and have it
Pleasure to have it none; to lose it, pain;66

or

I needs must break
These bonds that so defame me: not without
She wills it; would I, if she willed it? nay,
Who knows?67

in his bold attempts to overcome his weakness—

"... I aware with them only in the hope
That could I touch or see the Holy Grail
They might be plucked asunder.68

His greatness lies in his admitting his guilt and experiencing
remorse for it.

In Malory, Merlin brings Guinevere to King Arthur's
court. Tennyson's substitution of Lancelot for Merlin is
intentional. Guinevere had not seen Arthur before and taking

65 The Poems, LE, 11. 121-23.
66 Ibid., LE, 11. 1402-4.
67 Ibid., LE, 11. 1409-12.
68 Ibid., HG, 11. 775-77.
Lancelot for him, she fell in love at first sight.

Sir Lancelot went ambassador, at first,
To fetch her, and she watched him from her wall.
A rumour runs she took him for the King,
So fixt her fancy on him. 69

This small incident imparts a kind of inevitability to
their love, and softens the sting of their guilt. Nature
also conspired to bring the two together:

And Lancelot past away among flowers —
(For then was latter April) — and returned 70
Among the flowers, in May, with Guinevere.

Poor Lancelot is as much a tragic victim of the evil as its
agent.

But it does not matter how fair and faithful an
unlicensed love may be, the poet feels, it opens the door
to sensuality for others, especially when found in such
high position as next to the throne. Lancelot is soon
succeeded by Tristram and Guinevere by Vivien. In addition
to this, it affects the destinies of nobler characters also.
It fills the heart of Geraint with suspicious regarding the
chastity of his wife Enid and puts her to severe trial.

69 The Poems, MV, 11. 772-75.
70 Ibid., GA, 11. 449-51.
But when a rumour rose about the Queen, 
Touching her guilty love for Lancelot . . .
Not less Geraint believed it; and therefell
A horror on him, lest his gentle wife,
Through that great tenderness for Guinevere
Had suffered, or should suffer any taint
In nature:71

It rends the heart of Balin who worships the Queen and
drives him to the woods only to meet his tragic doom.

'Queen? subject? but I see not what I see
Damsel and lover? hear not what I hear . . .
. . . and in him gloom on gloom
Deepened; he sharply caught his lance and shield,
Nor stayed to crave permission of the King.72

It facilitates the evil designs of Vivien; it kills the
innocent Elaine — but for his guilty love, Lancelot could
have cherished her love.

'Thou couldst have loved the maiden, shaped, it seems
By God for thee alone.'73

It encourages Tristram to flout publicly the established
values of the Round Table;

. . . 'O chief knight,
Right arm of Arthur in the battle field,
Great brother, thou nor I have made the world;
Be happy in thy fair Queen as I in mine'74

71 The Poems, MG, 11. 24-32.
72 Ibid., LE, 11. 276-84.
73 Ibid., LE, 11. 1355-6.
74 Ibid., LT, 11. 201-4.
and above all it spoils the purpose of King Arthur's life
by destroying his perfect social and individual order.
Giving the story a moral colouring is Tennyson's own idea
and is not warranted by his sources.

Guinevere, of the golden hair is 'beauty such as never
woman wore', 75 upon whose 'perfect lips', 76 'A man had given
all other bliss And all his worldly worth for this To waste
his whole heart in one kiss. ' 77 The bards called her
Gwenhwyvar, the white ghost and was said to be of haughty
disposition, a trait which Tennyson keeps. She is a full-
blooded woman who prefers a 'deep hued and many folded', 78
garden rose to a chaste lily. Being sense-bound she fails
to perceive the greatness of Arthur, the Spirit, and finds
him 'cold', and 'passion less', 79 'not like my Lancelot'. 80
She is easily aroused by jealousy in love. When she learnt
that Lancelot wore the scarlet token of a lady at the
tournament,

... she choked
And sharply turned about to hide her face,
Passed to her chamber, and there flung herself
Down on the great king's couch and writhed upon it. 81

75 The Poems, G, 1. 546.
76 Ibid., Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere, 1. 45.
77 Ibid., 11. 42-44.
78 Ibid., BB, 1. 265.
79 Ibid., G, 11. 403-4.
80 Ibid., G, 1. 404.
81 Ibid., LE, 11. 603-6.
Tennyson intends her to symbolise 'heart' or 'body'. In Malory, Arthur commends Guinevere to be burnt at the stake though she is rescued by Lancelot, but Tennyson's King Arthur, who is a second Christ, in his mercy, forgives his wife who turns a nun and atones for her sin. Guinevere as a symbol of beauty which ultimately comes to terms with moral truth suggests Tennyson's attraction to a sensuous art reluctantly giving way to a moral aesthetic. 82