CHAPTER I

THE CHORIC SONGS

The poems comprising this group are amongst the earliest Greek mythological poems of Tennyson, composed about the same time, though published within the space of a few years in two different collections of poems, namely, Poems Chiefly Lyrical (1830) and Poems (1833). They are "The Sea-Fairies," "The Hesperides," and "The Lotus Eaters." These poems belong to the period generally known as Tennyson's Cambridge days, i.e., from Nov. 1827 to March 1831, though many critics feel that this should extend until Hallam's death. This phase is extremely important as it was Tennyson's first exposure to the world beyond the narrow confines of his family circle. He found himself amidst a new set of energetic young people, the Apostles, and their ideologies, which were in direct conflict with the poet's natural propensities.

Before joining Cambridge Tennyson's acquaintance with the world was limited mainly to Somersby, a village tucked away in some remote corner of Lincolnshire, with its brook flowing through its upland valley, of the 'ridged wolds' that rose above his home, of the mountain-glen and the snowy summits of his early dreams, and of beings, heroes and fairies, with
which his imaginary world was peopled.  

Apart from this, he had the company of books in his father’s library. His poetic talent, with this limited exposure, flowed mainly in two channels, not always strictly separate, because escapist poetry formed part of both. They are:

(a) Poems suffused with rich descriptions, embodying his "passion for the past" expressed through themes of history, or the classical and romantic lore.

(b) Melancholy poems expressing the sorrow of his heart.

(a) These are poems of sumptuous thumbnail descriptions with vivid and sensitive "embroideries" in words, and his "passion for the past," expressed through retelling themes of history and of the classical and romantic lore. A glance at his poems till 1827, when he joined Cambridge, reveals that they were mainly derivative in nature, written on themes taken from books on history, folklore, or legends, e.g., "Written by an Exile of Bassorah," "The Druid's Prophesies," "The Expedition of Nadir Shah," "The High Priest to Alexander," "Mithridates Presenting Berenice with the Cup of Poison."

1. A Memoir, I, pp. XII-XIII.

Paden observes that in this "most inaccessible and sparsely populated region of Lincolnshire ... young Tennyson seem to have had no regular companions of their own age; from the servants and villagers they were separated by a consciousness of caste. Their knowledge of people was rather narrowly limited to the immediate family; a fact which implies that the lives of the young Tennyson boys were dominated by the figure of their father."

(Paden, Tennyson in Egypt,
"Oh Ye Wild Winds, that Roar and Rave" tries to project in a cogent form the fascination he had for the past and the strange way in which he said he had felt voices speaking to him on the wind. The phrase "far far away" had a spell-like hold on him, so much so that in ripe old age he made it the theme of a poem and had it set to music.²

(b) The melancholy poems were the uncontrolled effusion of his suffering heart. Life at home was not a happy one, partly because of pecuniary bottlenecks but largely because of the uncongenial domestic environment.

Young Alfred's "adolescence was dominated by the stern figure of Rev. Dr. Tennyson -- tutor, father and priest -- a man given to spells of neurotic despair," and Tennyson being a sensitive and obedient child was "scared by his father's fits of despondency"³ and often wished to die, to sleep for ever, for to wake was depressing.⁴ In "Memory [Aye me]" he says:

Why at break of cheerful day
Doth my spirit faint away
Like a wanderer in the night?

Why in visions of the night

2. The poem was begun in Sept. 1888 and published in 1889. 
(See The Poems of Tennyson, p. 1405).


4. Ibid.
Am I shaken with delight
Like a lark at dawn of day?

(ll. 29-34).

The poems composed in such moods were invariably tinged
with death wish, e.g., "Remorse," "I Wander in Darkness
and Sorrow," "The Grave of a Suicide," "Unhappy Man, Why
Wander There," "No More," etc. But often, brooding over
his lot, he would slip into his world of dreams where

All adown the busy ways
Come sunny faces of lost days,
Long to mouldering dust consigned,
Forms which live but in the mind.

("In Deep and Solemn Dreams," ll. 13-16).

It may be said that escaping into a dream world of the
past from the harsh realities of the present became a
habit with him.

Tennyson's entry into Cambridge, under the given
circumstances, was a landmark in his poetic career. When
he joined Cambridge he was a young boy with an exceptionally
keen sensibility and an unquestionable genius for poetic
composition. His poems reflected the isolated, insulated
Somersby that he knew, untouched by the hustle and bustle
of the outside world. His genius was surprisingly facile
In luxuriant descriptions of Nature and in composing poems on themes far removed from the concerns of his time. He believed that the work of the poet was to suggest the beauty of virtue to men, but chiefly by perpetuating this lovely paradise, adding perhaps another rose-blown arbour, or a fresh fountain, where ageless nymphs might trip down and unveil their limbs in the moon of an eternal summer.

Poems like "The Merman" and "The Mermaid" are poems of sheer delight and escape from the realities of life:

I would sit and sing the whole of the day;  
I would fill the sea-halls with a voice of power;  
But at night I would roam abroad and play  
With the mermaids in and out of the rocks,  
Dressing their hair with the white sea-flower;  
And holding them back by their flowing locks  
I would kiss them often under the sea....

("The Merman," ll. 9-15).

Escaping from the mundane realities of life into such a fairy world was a habit formed at Somersby. He felt he could live there for ever. But his Apostle friends, Blackesley, Trench, Maurice, Hallam and the rest, thought otherwise. They enjoined on him the ethics of art. They had very high ideals about the vocation of a poet, as is evident from what F.D. Maurice wrote in "The Athenaeum":

The mind of a poet of the highest order is the most perfect that can belong to man. There is no intellectual power, and no state of feeling, which may not be the instrument of poetry, and in proportion as reason, reflection, or sympathy is wanting, in the same degree is the poet restricted in his mastery over the resources of his art. The poet is the great interpreter of nature's mysteries, not by narrowing them into the grasp of understanding, but by connecting each of them with the feeling which changes doubt to faith.... He sympathizes with all phenomena by his intuition of all principles; and his mind is a mirror which catches and images the whole scheme and working of the world. He comprehends all feelings, though he cherishes only the best.... He cannot be a scioner, or selfish, or luxurious and sensual. He cannot be untrue, for it is his high calling to interpret those universal truths which exist on the earth only in the forms of his creation. 6

The Apostles felt that it did not behove the artist to give himself up to the mere pleasure of creation. Although the "Aesthetic Movement" whose "roots lie in the German theory, proposed by Kant (1790), that aesthetic contemplation is 'disinterested', indifferent both to the reality and to the utility of the beautiful object..." did not enter England before the last part of the nineteenth century; its vogue on the continent might have made it a subject of debate among the Cambridge undergraduates. Tennyson appears to be easily influenced by them, for he composed a number of

6. Quoted by Paden, op.cit., pp. 149-150.
poems on the sanctity, sublimity, and the power of the poet, reflecting in them the large claims for poetry current in Cambridge. "To Poesy [O God make this age great]," "The Poet's Song," and "To Poesy [Religion be Thy Sword]," a joint composition of Tennyson and Hallam, are some such poems. It seems, however, that the Apostles were not quite satisfied with what Tennyson wrote, even though, ostensibly, he agreed with them. Their arguments to convince him, continued. Once Trench said to him, "Tennyson we cannot live in art," The poet's response was in the form of a poem prefixed to his allegory, "The Palace of Art," stating that it was prompted by his (Trench's) remark. He said it was about

A glorious Devil, large in heart and brain,
That did love Beauty only, (Beauty seen
In all varieties of mould and mind)
And Knowledge for its beauty; or if Good,
Good only for its beauty ....

(ll. 5-9).

This was a total submission to their will. Baum, however, points out an interesting fact about "The Palace of Art." He says that although Tennyson condemned in it art for art's sake, in practice he seemed to adhere to it, for the poem has "an explicit moral, characteristically Victorian

(the compromise) and confused (because most of the poem is on art's side and the poet is not)." Tennyson's explanation of "The Lady of Shalott" to Alfred Ainger, that it was about coming "out of the region of shadows into that of realities," becomes extremely significant in this context. It might be taken to imply that perhaps opting for reality, for the poet, was akin to opting for death. Since "The Lady of Shalott" also belongs to the Cambridge days, it can be treated as a work throwing light on this mood. Thus, in "The Palace of Art," inspite of his assertion, and in other non-mythical poems, without any such assertion, Tennyson gives himself away, though he seems to be on the defensive, almost accepting a weakness he feels ashamed of. Baum illuminates the truth about the poet with his comment on Yeats's judgment of Tennyson. He first quotes Yeats:

The poetry which found expression in the poetry of writers like Browning and Tennyson, and even of writers, who are seldom classed with them, like Swinburne, and like Shelley in his earlier years, pushed its limits as far as possible, and tried to absorb into itself the science and politics, the philosophy and morality of its time; but a new poetry, which is always contracting its limits, has grown up under the shadow of the old. Rossetti began it, ... 12


and then reflects:

Rossetti did not exactly begin it, for it was already in Tennyson (but had in some degree been driven out of him by the reviewers) and of course had existed long before Tennyson...13

The Apostles, however, took upon themselves the responsibility of driving it out even before the reviewers entered the scene. Critics have realized and accepted that the natural instinct of the poet lay in the sheer joy of art. A great deal of his descriptions of nature are "external and pictorial," "just as a great deal of his 'music' is music only, without the depth which distinguishes melody from a mere tune." Baum continues that such admired lines as "The mellow ouzel fluted in the elm," "The moan of doves in immemorial elms,/ And murmuring of innumerable bees—" suggest Tennyson's leanings towards art-for-art's sake which he seemed to severely condemn.14 Aubrey de Vere says about "The Palace of Art," a poem supposedly upholding responsible art, that, "nearly every stanza is a picture condensed within four lines. It describes a Palace not a Temple, one created by the imagination exclusively for its own delight...."15

Tennyson used to say that the source of the power

of his poetry is described in "Merlin and the Gleam," where "Gleam" stands for the poet's "higher poetic imagination." Uptil now the "Gleam" had helped Tennyson to escape from the trying present. The habit persisted during the Cambridge days, for we find that the Cambridge days, too, were fraught with problems. Arthur Hallam urged him for "an honest examination of things as they were; he would beg his friend not to flee the Real in his love for the Ideal... and he would argue that 'where the ideas of time and sorrow are not, and sway not the soul with power, there is no true knowledge in Poetry or Philosophy.'" Tennyson's reason would agree but his heart would not. The struggle is depicted in an unfinished allegory -- "Sense and Conscience." "Conscience" is projected as a giant, drugged by "Sense." "Memory" reminds the giant of his plight and he weeps tears of blood. In "The Palace of Art," the "soul"


17. Tennyson wrote to his aunt, Mrs. Russell, from Cambridge: "I am sitting owl-like and solitary in my rooms (nothing between me and the stars but a stratum of tiles) ....What a pity it is that the golden days of the Faerie are over! What a misery not to be able to consolidate our gossamer dreams into reality!"

(A Memoir, I, p. 34).


It is ironical that even Hallam, in his zeal for the social-responsibility of a poet and the relevance of his creation to the time, overlooked completely that it was real sorrow that swayed the soul of the poet into composition.
is made a sinful "soul" which first rejoices and makes "merry" in its own world of art but in the end feels lonely and repents.

The 'Choric Songs', (i.e., "The Sea-Fairies," "The Hesperides," and "The Lotos-Eaters"), are related in theme to "The Palace of Art," "Sense and Conscience," "The Poet" and "The Poet's Mind." The three mythical poems embody the conflict between Tennyson the pure artist and Tennyson the poet who is but lately made aware of his responsibility towards society. These 'Choric Songs' reflect his efforts at resolving the tussle between the pure artist and the poet through the medium of myths.

The subject of "The Sea-Fairies" is drawn from the Odyssey and is also influenced by Croker's Fairy Legends. The poem is about Ulysses and his crew sailing past the island of the Sirens on their way to Ithaca.

Homer's Circe had warned Ulysses that the Sirens, with their power of irresistibly sweet music, enchant the mariners on the high seas, and once they have the unwary sailors on their shore they kill them. Homer says, the "verdant meads" have become "white" with "human bones" and the ground is polluted "with human gore" which floats on the "dreadful shore." Homer does not describe these...

seducresses and leaves their appearance to the imagination of the reader. Tennyson describes them but his Sea-Fairies do not show any trace of their bloody aspects. They are depicted as rather "innocent creatures, almost angels in appearance, who invite not to sin, but to a carefree holiday." There is no suggestion whatsoever of human carnage tainting the shore with "gore." The poet does not even call them Sirens. He gives them a new name — 'Sea-Fairies' — and makes them sing:

Whither away from the high green field,  
and the happy blossoming shore?  
Day and night to the billow the fountain calls;  
Down shower the gambolling waterfalls  
From wandering over the lea:  

(ll. 8-11).

Tennyson's mariners are "weary," yet "wary" as they sail slowly and see "Betwixt the green brink and the running foam,/ Sweet faces, rounded arms, and bosoms prent/ To little harps of gold...." (ll. 2-4). The opening stanza provides the setting and context of the situation and then the actual song, with its insistent invitation, takes over. By the time the poem comes to the last stanza the song-filled call of the Sea-Fairies assumes undertones of almost a challenge to the stoic self-control of the sailors.

with the question:

Who can light on as happy a shore
All the world o'er, all the world o'er?
Whither away? listen and stay: Mariner,
Mariner, fly no more.

(ll. 40-42).

They ask the mariners to take heed:

O listen, listen, your eyes shall glisten
With pleasure and love and jubilee:
O listen, listen, your eyes shall glisten
When the sharp clear twang of the golden chords
Runs up the ridged sea.

(ll. 35-39).

The lush green shore contrasts with the "ridged" briny sea
the mariners are ploughing with their oars. The gay life
of the Sea-Fairies, with their "sweet faces," "rounded arms"
and "little harps of gold" pressed to their bosom is in
opposition to the fatigued state of the mariners; the
playful, carefree, flirtatious song of the Sea-Fairies is an
antithesis to the frigid "whispering" of the mariners, half
in fear. Tennyson does not even once make his Sea-Fairies
call Ulysses by his name, or sing of his exploits on the
Trojan fields as Homer's Sirens do. The latter's open praise
of Ulysses takes up almost the whole of their song in
the _Odyssey_, with just two lines about the temptations they
offer: "Approach! thy soul shall into raptures rise/
Approach! and learn new wisdom from the wise!" The first line offers pleasure to the "soul" and the second "new wisdom from the wise." The offer could hardly tempt the rough and tough seamen who are returning from a war fought for the most beautiful woman of the world. It appears that Homer himself did not dilate at all on the wilson tho Sirens employed. Tennyson gauged the potential of the situation, for this was a gap in an ancient tale which provided ample scope to his inventive genius and creative imagination.

The poem almost begins and ends with the song of the Sea-Fairies. Tennyson, from the beginning, arouses our curiosity about the outcome of the tussle that ensues between the will power of the sailors to resist, and the wiles of the Sea-Fairies to entice, with their "shrill music" which reaches the "weary mariners" in the middle of the sea as they muse, "Whispering to each other half in fear " (line 5). The setting removes them in time and place from the rigours of the present. Tennyson provides through them beautiful images of a remote and romantic world.

The portrayal of the Sirens in "The Sea-Fairies" is quite different from that of Homer. Tennyson is keen to

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22. Appendix I, Ai, p. 221.
highlight their beauty, grace, and music. Their charm is both visual and aural. They sing tantalizing songs, and promise to make the life of the mariners one long honeymoon on the "blossoming shore" with its fountains and "gambolling waterfalls." Homer describes at length Ulysses' precautions to resist the Sirens. Tennyson's forewarned mariners are, instead, awestruck and resist the enticements with their will power. "The Sea-Fairies" can be said to be a symbolic presentation of the enchantment of art.

If "The Sea-Fairies" is about the strong attraction of art, "The Hesperides" is an attempt to understand and explicate it. Just as "The Sea-Fairies" is formally the song of these beautiful maidens, "The Hesperides" is mainly the song of the three sisters, the Hesperides. There is, however, an atmosphere of sanctity and mystery in "The Hesperides," for the act of creation is in itself a holy act. Discussing its sources, Ricks suggests the religious mythologizing of G.S. Faber, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Edward Davies' *Celtic Researches* and Hanno's *Periplus*. Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica* and Hesiod's *Theogony*, from amongst the classics, give parts of the myth of the Hesperides though

Ricks does not mention them as sources. The myths of Hesper and Hesperides are not as well known as those of Iliad, Odyssey, or Aeneid. In his treatment of the myth Tennyson provides a setting for the song of the Hesperides, as he does for that of the Sea-Fairies. However, in "The Sea-Fairies" the background is epical but in "The Hesperides" it is historical, comprising Hanno, the Carthagian, and his crew. This may have been done to make it appear to be less misty, though the poet throws over it a strange charm of other-worldly antiquity as well, with the mystical hierophantic chant, whose aura makes it vacillate between a


G.R. Stange in "Tennyson's Garden of Art: A Study of 'The Hesperides'," Critical Essays on the Poetry of Tennyson, p. 101, says: "All the elements of the myth upon which the highly individual structure of 'The Hesperides' is built can be found in Hesiod's rendering of the fable."

Paden in Tennyson in Egypt (Appendix, p. 99) quotes a passage from T.H. Lounsbury's The Life and Times of Tennyson (Yale University Press 1915), in which Lounsbury says that Xenophon and Apollonius Rhodius are directly referred to in Poems by Two Brothers. Paden also cites Harold Nicolson, Tennyson (New York, 1925, p. 51), who states: "at the age of sixteen Tennyson had read... Apollonius Rhodius...."

The myths of the Hesperides as found in Hesiod and Apollonius Rhodius are given in Appendix I, Aii, pp. 222-223, and Aiii, pp. 223-224.
historical and mythical world. With great sensibility, scholarship and dexterity, Tennyson attempts to fix the event, historically and geographically, by the use of Greek place names like "Soleö" and "Thymiaterion." He then focusses on the palpable calm and silence that prevails in that region, for as long as Hanno sailed through it, he

Heard neither warbling of the nightingale,
Nor melody o' the Libyan lotusflute
Blown seaward from the shore....

(ll. 6-8).

The implication obviously is that the nightingale had stopped singing and the 'lotusflute' was silent in reverence to the sacred song of the Hesperides. Consequently, there was just one sound floating towards the sea from a slope "That ran bloombright into the Atlantic blue,/ Beneath a highland leaning down a weight/ Of cliffs, and zoned below with cedarshade,"(ll. 9-11). -- that of "voices, like voices in a dream,/ Continuous, till he reached the outer sea." (ll. 12-13). It is obvious that these voices are the voices of the Hesperides who keep singing to guard and rear the "golden apple" which is "the hallowed fruit."

Like "The Sea-Fairies," this poem too is about art and the artist, but of a different cast. Robert Stange.
makes an important statement with regard to this poem. He writes: "... in a sense Tennyson's will remained divided. In his more popular work there is an attempt either to suppress his conflicting desires for social engagement and for the life of art, or to resolve his conflict in favour of 'the whole life' -- to treat the withdrawal to a palace of art or to a lotos-land as an aberration--of what 'the people's poet' came to feel was the devil's side in this continuing debate."\(^2^5\)

Although Tennyson's will was divided during this period (and for a long time to come), a close perusal of this poem reveals that the poet simply describes here conditions conducive to and required for the creation of art. It is difficult to agree with Stange's view that the poem indulges in the ethics of art. We can say that in Tennyson art-for-art's sake is in its nascent form. It can be called both innocent and beautiful. It did not remain so with others for by the end of the nineteenth century we find that in Swinburne it becomes a defiance, "an apotheosising the Devil rather than God."\(^2^6\) This becomes obvious when the


poem is viewed against the background of certain Iron-mythical poems on a similar theme. In "The Poet's Mind" the poet explains that a certain environment alone can stimulate the poet's creative powers. His mind should not be "vexed," and "sophists" should not venture near the spot where he stands, for it is hallowed ground and would be desecrated, and the poet's power would vanish, by their intrusion:

Vex not thou the poet's mind
With thy shallow wit:
Vox not thou the poet's mind;
For thou canst not fathom it.

(ll. 1-4)

The poet says that he will perform certain rituals to keep the garden of poetry in full bloom: "Holy water will I pour/Into every spicy flower" (ll. 12-13). But if the "cruel cheer" of the logician will come near, these "flowers" will be blighted. All this points to Tennyson's extreme sensitiveness. Its seeds were sown when he was still quite young. This is evident from the Latin epigraph he wrote on the title page of his play, "The Devil and the Lady," when he was only fourteen:

Spe s alit juventutem et poesen, vituperatio premit
et laedit (Hope nourishes youth and poesy, abuse
represses and injures it). 27

This shows the extravagant sensitivity to criticism which he was never able to shake off even at the zenith of his fame. It had already started "shadowing his boyish mind." In "Evelyn and the Glean" he shows that harsh, unsympathetic criticism is harmful to the inspiration "gleam" of the poet:

Once at the crook of a haven who cross it,
A barbarous people,
Blind to the magic,
And deaf to the melody,
Snarled at and cursed me.
A demon vexed me,
The light retreated,
The landscape darkened,
The melody deafened,...

(ll. 24-30).

The poems have, therefore, to be guarded against vile criticism, or else the poet's power would decline. This is symbolically expressed in "The Hesperides," where the fruition of the "golden apples" is a sacred act, and so, while the Hesperides (who symbolize the inspired artist) are singing --- "Standing about the charmed root" --- everything else is mute as though a holy sacrament is being performed, which demands reverence and sanctity, and can be

27. This epigraph was written on the title page of possibly only one of the manuscripts of the play. It is in Sir Charles Tennyson's possession.

(The Poems of Tennyson, p. 8).

The fact that snide remarks and adverse comments dampened his spirit and affected his inspiration is evident from the epigraph and is expressed symbolically in "The Hesperides."
defined by the slightest light-hearted banter or ridicule.

The poet, in the opening stanza, carefully depicts the unearthly and awe-inspiring silence all around, with just faint voices coming to "Zoonian Eamoo," which seem "like voices in a dream." The impression of the reverent, holy silence is heightened by the song of the Hesperides who chant:

Round about all is mute,
As the snowfield on the mountain-peaks,
As the sandfield at the mountain-foot.
Crocodiles in briny creeks
Sleep and stir not; all is mute.

(ll. 15-22).

Singing is a compulsion unto the reciting of hierophantic hymns. Here it helps in the creation and regeneration of the golden fruit of the sacred tree and the Hesperides are performing their duty with dedication:

Keen-eyed Sisters, singing airdly,
Looking warily
Every way,
Guard the apple night and day,
Lest one from the East come and take it away.

(ll. 30-42).

The poem begins with an epigraph from "Corpus": "Hesperus and his daughters three, they sing about the golden tree." Stange, drawing attention to its ancient theme, writes:
Milton's Garden of the Hesperides is a place of repose and joyful freedom. The chief resemblance of his poem to Milton's is in the parallel conception of the garden as a restful abode for the privileged spirit and as a source of creativity -- in Milton's one of the higher life, and in Tennyson's of the life of art.

Creation of art, of poetry, is akin to and is symbolized as the creation of the golden apples in this poem. The poet says:

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For the blossom unto threefold music bloweth;
Evermore it is born anew;
And the sap to threefold music floweth,
From the root
Drawn in the dark,
Up to the fruit,
Creeping under the fragrant bark,
Liquid gold, honey sweet, through and through.
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(11. 30-37).

In "The Poet" also Tennyson expresses the act of creation of poetry through the image of vegetation and growth:

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Then, like the arrow-seeds of the field flower,
The fruitful wit

Cleaving, took root, and springing forth anew
Where'er they fell, behold,
Like to the mother plant in semblance, grew
A flower all gold,
And bravely furnished all abroad to fling
The winged shafts of truth,
To throng with stately blooms the breathing spring
Of Hope and Youth.
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(11. 19-28).

Just as "The Sea-Fairies" and "The Hesperides" are mainly the songs of the Sirens and the Hesperides respectively, "The Lotos-Eaters" is, basically, the song of Ulysses' lotos-addicted mariners who are fed up with their toil of a seemingly endless voyage in search of their homeland, Ithaca. The poem begins, like "The Sea-Fairies" and "The Hesperides," with a brief account of the setting. It seems that after a tiring and hazardous long voyage, Ulysses espies land. He tries to instil hope in the worn-out mariners. "'Courage!' he said, and pointed toward the land, 'This mounting wave will roll us seawards soon'." (ll. 1-2). The mariners who were resisting the temptation of the green isles in "The Sea-Fairies" willingly land on the Lotos-Isle. The rest and joy offered by the Sea-Fairies is now to be got from the somnambulent lotos-fruit. It can be said that the lotos-fruit replaces the Sea-Fairies metaphorically. The source of the poem is *Odyssey.* It is noteworthy that Homer does not gloss over the feelings of the mariners after their partaking of the lotos-fruit. He simply states that since they were not willing to set sail again, Ulysses had to take them back to the ships by sheer physical force. Buckley hints at the link between the two poems in respect of both theme and

The Lotos-Island, if the island of the Sea-Fairies, is a land of streams, fountains, and meadows. Eating the Lotos-fruit is said to be symbolically akin to accepting the invitation of the Sea-Fairies to a life of pleasure. The very unresistant mariners at last succumb to the hold of the Lotos-fruit resulting in their complete surrender to the pleasure of the fruit.

"The Sea-Fairies" and "The Lotos-Eaters" appear to be not just modern reconstructions of certain situations from a wider canvas of Greek mythology; they are rooms of escape from the demands of a world of reality into a world of art, of losing oneself in art. While "The Sea-Fairies" signifies the struggle of the artist to resist the call of art-for-art's sake, "The Lotos-Eaters," symbolically presents the artist's surrender to this call. Like these two mythical poems, the duo of "The Palace of Art" and the incomplete "Sense and Conscience" have the same theme but with a difference. In the non-mythical poems there is remorse on the realization of the poet's submission to the hold of

30."'The Sea-Fairies' anticipates 'The Lotos-Eaters' in both theme and imagery as a dramatic rendering of the seductions of a sensuous art, the temptation to escape from reason and responsibility.

art. a theoretical one, forever, the poet_roots out a case for such a surrender: "All things have rest: why should we toil alone, / We only toil, who are the first of things, / And make perpetual noon, / Still from one sorrow to another thrown" (ll. 60-63). The mariners complain: "Why should we only toil, the roof and crown of things?" (line 69). They argue: "Let us alone. What pleasure can we have / To war with evil? Is there any peace / In ever climbing up the climbing wave?" (ll. 93-95), and conclude: "Give us long rest or death, dark death, or dreadful ease." (line 98). This line harks back to the Somersby Tennyson who flees from home to the graveyard and longs to die or to lose himself in dreams of the heroic past. This is what he seems to be doing in the guise of the mariners of the legendary Ulysses in this poem.

There are a number of things that are strikingly similar in these three Choric Songs. There is music on the island of the Sea-Fairies, there is music in the Hesperian garden, and there is music on the Lotos-Isle as well: "Music that gentler on the spirit lies, / Than tired eyelids upon tired eyes..." (ll. 50-51). The island of the Sea-Fairies has high green fields and the "happy blossoming shore." In "The Hesperides," the three sisters sing and dance on an island whose slope is "bloom bright." In this
garden, sacred to the gods, "Every flower and every fruit
the redolent breath/ Of this warm seawind ... ripeneth "
(ll. 83-84). There are "Two streams upon the violet deep"
(line 88), just as on the Lotos-Isle there is a "slender
stream" which "Along the cliff to fall and pause and fall
did seem" (line 9). The pleasure described in the poems
is more like an opiate to escape into a romantic dreamland
of song, dance, music and enjoyment. In this context it
is interesting to note that song, dance and music are
sacred to the Muses. Hesiod calls them "nine like-minded
dughters, whose one thought/ Is singing, and whose hearts
are free from care./ There on Olympus are their lovely
homes..." He describes them in the long introductory hymn
in Theogony, saying:

With Heliconian Muses let us start
Our song: they hold the great and godly mount
Of Helicon, on their delicate feet
They dance around the darkly bubbling spring
And round the alter of the mighty Zeus.

Dance, fair and graceful, on the mountain-top
And whirl their feet about...32

A few lines later Hesiod writes that the Muses "delight/
with song the mighty mind of father Zeus/ Within Olympus..."

31. Dorothea Wender, Hesiod: Theogony, Works and Days;
Theognis: Erigies. (1973; rpt., Harmondsworth,

32. Ibid., p. 23.
and continues, "the halls of father Zeus/ The Thunderer,
shine gladly when the pure/ Voice of the goddesses is
scattered forth;/ The echo spreads to snowy Olympus' peak/
And the immortals' homes." 33 "The Sea-Fairies," "The Lotos-
Eaters," and "The Hesperides" may be regarded as poems of
different versions of the Muses and their homes. The
landscape depicted in them recalls the hills and meadows of
the sacred homes of gods, viz., Olympus, Parnassus, Helicon,
and Pieria. The last three are the specific mounts of the


Tennyson describes the abode of the Greek gods in "To
B.L. On His Travels in Greece," a poem he wrote in praise
of Edward Lear's Journal of a Landscape Painter in
Albania and Illyria:

Illyrian woodlands, echoing falls
Of water, sheets of summer glass,
The long divine Penelian pass,
The vast Akrokeraunian walls,

Tomohrit, Athoe, all things fair,
With such a pencil, such a pen,
You shadow forth to distant men,
I read and felt that I was there:

And trust me while I turned the page,
And tracked you still on classic ground,
I grew in gladness till I found
My spirits in the golden age.

For me the torrent ever poured
And glistened -- here and there alone
The broad-limbed Gods at random thrown
By fountain-urns; and Naiads oared....

(ll. 1-16).
Muses and, significantly, Tennyson points to the three mountain peaks in "The Lotos-Eaters":

They saw the gleaming river seaward flow
From the inner land; far off, three mountain-tops,
Three silent pinnacles of aged snow,
Stood sunset-flushed...34

(ll. 14-17)

The gods pass their time in the pleasures of music in these celestial abodes. So do the Lotos-Eaters. After feasting on the lotos-fruit they declare:

Let us swear an oath, and keep it with an equal mind,
In the hollow Lotos-land to live and lie reclined
On the hills like Gods together, careless of mankind.

(ll. 153-155).

The Muses dance and sing on the verdurous meadows of the Heliconian and Parnassian heights while Zeus enjoys the music. The Sea-Fairies and the Hesperides dance and sing on their island homes. The Lotos-Eaters, comparing themselves to the mythical gods, like them, become indifferent to the travails of mankind. They enjoy the privileges — such as

34. Paden writes that "The Sea-Fairies" is "related, through the Sirens and Ulysses, to the land of 'The Lotos-Eaters'—which contained the three mountain-peaks that, according to Faber, were characteristic of all holy mountains and hence of all legendary Lands of the Blest (Faber, III, 205-207).

It is scarcely possible to overstate the close connections that obtained in the 1820's between Islands of the Blest, fairies, sea-fairies, nymphs, mermaids, and Arthurian romance."
the music of the Muses that are the sole domain of the gods. There is, however, a subtle difference. The mariners themselves are the Muses who sing and the gods who enjoy, for they sing and enjoy their own music, are entertained and are the entertainers, at one and the same time, forgetful of all else in the world. The Lotos-Island, by analogy, appears to be their celestial abode. The mariners have already accepted it as their home for they refuse to leave it.

One of the common strands running through the poems is the singing of the protagonists although songs as such do not figure in all the sources of these poems. Homer does give the Sirens' song, but as regards the Lotos-Eaters, he merely mentions the effect of the lotoa-fruit on the mariners and the difficulty with which they are dragged back to their ships by Ulysses. The scattered sources of the Hesperides mention Hesperides' singing while guarding the apples, but do not give the songs. Therefore, the similar opening and the songs embodying the mood of the singers are Tennyson's own innovations. The consistency with which the pattern is followed in these three poems points to a definite relationship between the poems. Possibly they contain a confession

35. The image of the Greek gods, absorbed in pleasure, indifferent to mankind, reminds one of the traditional imago of Vishnu, reclining on the lotus-couch, with spouse Laxmi tending him and the lesser gods and mortals hymning to him and his glory.
the poet may not make openly for fear of criticism and
disapproval of the Apostles and others. With great
refinement and skill he brings alive the situations with
the songs and makes them reflect the mood and the psyche of
the singers. W.J. Fox, in his review of Tennyson's *Poems,
Chiefly Lyrical* (1830), had complimented the poet on his
power of empathy and written that the poet had shown the
way towards a new kind of poetry for it had metaphysical
depth and psychological profundity. He said the poet
seems to enter into a mind as he would make his way into a
landscape and portrayed states of mind. He does something
more in these poems. In depicting the mariners' state of
mind he reflects through them his own state of mind and its
tensions, while he projects the mythical characters from
within and makes the situations and personages chosen
vibrant with life, thought, and emotion.

In depicting the Hesperian Gardens, the island of
the Sea-Fairies, and the island of the Lotos-Eaters,
Tennyson makes them rich, colourful and blooming with an
eternal spring, comparable to the abode of the immortals
as portrayed by the ancients. Stange says that it is
visualized in the form of a "lost paradise." In "Timbuctoo"

36 Refer to Dr. O.P. Govil's article, "Browning's Literary
Father" in *The Indian Journal of English Studies*, Vol. IX
(1968), for a fuller discussion of this aspect.
Tennyson apostrophized the lost Atlantis and Eldorado:
"Where are ye /Thrones of the Western wave, fair Islands
green?" (ll. 40-41). They seem to be located in the
mythical lands of his imagination.

The Green Isles of these poems and the sea are
juxtaposed. But while these garden-islands appear to have
kinship with the sacred abode of the Muses and hence art,
the sea is the common symbol of life. The tenability of
this interpretation is evidenced by what Waterston has said
in this regard:

[Tennyson] sought societal symbols, rejecting images
whose impact was guaranteed only by his private expe-
rience.... Tennyson, used familiar poetic parallels (of
the sea to life, of rocks to death, of birds to escape
and so on)....37

The first thing that strikes one in these poems is
that the myths Tennyson chose were comparatively slight
when visualized in the larger context of the narratives,
i.e., the whole of Odyssey or Theogony or Argonautica. They
are not even re-narrations of single complete episodes
chosen from the whole. They are, in fact, fragmentary in

in Critical Essays on the Poetry of Tennyson,
pp. 113-114.
Besides, the opening of the three poems consists of the interaction of the sailors on the sea with the music emanating from the shore. There is evident a progressive modification in the sailors’ approach towards the shore and its music in these poems. In “The Sea-Fairies” the sailors are firmly on their guard; they are stiff and resist the call from the shore. In “The Hesperides,” Hanno neither resists nor goes towards the music which comes floating from the shore. It appears to him as though he is hearing it in a dream. He sails on, quietly, absorbed in the music. In “The Lotos-Eaters,” however, the mariners are exhausted in their struggle with the stormy sea and take to the shore to partake of its leisure and music. It is evident that the attitude of the mariners towards the shore reflects the progressive change in the attitude of the poet himself to art. Just as the resistance of Ulysses and his crew to the Sirens’ music is rooted in Circe’s warning about its danger, the poet’s hesitation in opting for art-for-art’s sake is evidently the result of the influence of the Apostles’ dinning into his ears the baneful effect of pure

38. “The Hesperides,” says T.S. Eliot, “is a fragmentary ‘Hesperides’, in which only the ‘Song of the Three Sisters’ is complete.”


By calling “The Lotos-Eaters” a “proem” and not a poem Douglas Bush, too, emphasizes its incompleteness in Mythology and the Romantic Tradition in English Poetry, p. 207.
art. These three mythical poems, taken together, reveal the tension this (the Apostles' influence) creates within the poet's mind and the solution that comes naturally to him. "The Sea-Fairies" is about the temptation of art whereas "The Hesperides" is an attempt to explicate it. This poem can be regarded as Tennyson's answer to the question: What, after all, is art? and the answer: art and its creation are holy and sacred. It is a kind of worship, and hence free of guilt or shame. The poet, therefore, gives in to its call. "The Lotos-Eaters" symbolizes his final surrender. We can say that since the poet is not convinced of the potential of any harm accruing from pure art, he does not resist its call any more. On the contrary, he gathers ample courage to own up his weakness for it, but only from behind the camouflage of mythology. In his non-mythical poems, "The Palace of Art" and "Sense and Conscience," he tries to expound and vindicate socially responsible art, but in the 'Choric Songs' he can be said to uphold "Sense" over "Conscience," almost without a qualm:

Surely, surely, slumber is more sweet than toil, the shore
Than labour in the deep mid-ocean, wind and wave and air;
Oh rest ye, brother mariners, we will not wander more.

(ll. 171-173)
The 'Choric Songs' first portray the tussle between the Cambridge and Somersby Tennyson, and then, show the victory of the latter over the former.

These three poems are linked together because they share the same metaphors and symbols and are related to each other thematically. The landscapes of these poems are similar to each other and to the abode of the Muses. All of them have lush green meadows, fountains, streams, springs and mountains. Apart from this, interestingly and significantly, the 'Choric Songs' are being sung on the shore of these islands. The islands are places of enchantment, mystery, love, pleasure, leisure, and of creativity symbolized by the endless golden apples nourished and nurtured by the continuous singing of the Hesperides who are the Muses themselves. The sea in "The Son-Fairies" and "The Hesperides" is calm, not turbulent. In "The Lotos-Eaters" it is, however, violent. The sea symbolizes life. The mariners signify the poet sailing on the sea of life. Their reaction to the music floating towards them from the shore in the three poems is a symbolic depiction of the gradual change in the poet's attitude towards art. In "The Sea-Fairies" he resists the magnetic attraction of the world of art under the influence of the Apostles, while in
"The Hesperides" he is filled with wonder and admiration at the holy act of its creation. It is in "The Lotus-Eaters" that he willingly submits to art. Some critics have surmised that this poem shows a state of disintegration as a result of total self-surrender. But the mood of the poem and the arguments of the mariners do not seem to justify this view. A mere rejection of the toil of life and the artist's surrender to art may not necessarily involve disintegration. This point shall be taken up and elaborated further in Paris' judgment in "Oenone" where the poet presents two choices to the artist in his option for art.

These three mythical poems are, indeed, Tennyson's earliest attempt to resolve his personal problems regarding art and social responsibility through the medium of ancient Greek myths. He is trying to find an answer to a moral question that confronts him. "The Hesperides" specially may be said to pose the moot query -- why should art-for-art's sake be unethical when its creation in itself is holy? The three poems together represent his search for an answer. The poet does some self analysis, through their thin veneer, without exposing himself to public gaze. In this set he is no longer on the defensive, and describes what he really is
and not what he ought to be according to the Apostles.
He is not bold enough to take this stand in the parallel
non-mythical poems, "The Palace of Art" and "Sense and
Conscience," but in the mythical poems he projects his
innermost urges unequivocally.

These poems stand out as a highly symbolical set
of poems with a number of common elements in them, viz.,
their slight indebtedness to various source myths, all
having songs embedded in them, their fragmentary character,
their introductory stanzas reading like preambles to the
songs, the predominance of the hedonistic mood, and their
landscapes recalling the abodes of the Greek gods with the
Muses singing heavenly music in an atmosphere of endless
spring. These 'Choric Songs' are suffused with an innermost
magic, reflective of the world of intense poetic imagina-
tion of the poet and its irresistible hold on him. In
"The New Timon" (part I), he says: "An artist, Sir,
should rest in Art." (line 21). He says this in this
trilogy too, through these three mythical poems.