CHAPTER III

POEMS WITH GREEK MYTHICAL HEROES AS PROTAGONISTS

The 'Choric Songs' stemmed from Tennyson's dilemma in art, the poems on mythical women were inspired by his admiration for women as sustainers of society, and the poems with mythical heroes as protagonists were born from his soulful cogitations on the loss of his friend Arthur Hallam.

The fact of Tennyson and Hallam's friendship and its immortalization in "In Memoriam" is well known. This friendship may be said to be the fulfilment of an inherent, long cherished dream of his Somersby days. The young Tennyson felt the need of a friend, inspite of the company of his brothers and sisters. From amongst the poems of this period, in two poems, "Friendship" and "The Dying Man to His Friend," the poet extols the virtues of friendship, saying that it alone gives solace to the parting soul of man and to the heart "racked and riven / By the hot shafts of baleful calumny." When the spirit of man is driven to despair, it advises his "lonely grief" to lean on it and "pour" within.

1. In the stanza given below, from "In Memoriam", he affirms that Arthur Hallam was dearer to him than his own brothers:

   My Arthur, whom I shall not see
   Till all my widowed race be run;
   Dear as the mother to the son,
   More than my brothers are to me.

   (IX, 11. 17-20)

its ear "the tale of misery." But the poet feels that friendship seldom abides in this world, and since his heart yearns for it and despair of it, in "Friendship," in a voice charged with emotion he asks, "But where art thou, thou comet of an age,/ Thou phoenix of a century?" (11. 19–20) and answers that the notion of its existence is but fancy:

"Perchance/ Thou art but of those fables which engage/ And hold the minds of men in giddy trance." (11. 20–22). "The Dying Man to His Friend," in retrospect, appears to portend Tennyson's loss of his friend as something pre-ordained. "Friendship" and "The Dying Man to His Friend," taken together, seem to say that the poet almost despaired to find a true friend in life, and feared that even if he found one, death would snatch him away from him. It is a strange coincidence that this is what actually happened. Hallam died on September 15, 1833, at Vienna, and the news of his death reached Somersby on October 1, 1833.  

Hallam's death was "the most significant single event in Tennyson's life and more than anything else determined the course of his mind." 4 It caused a break in Tennyson's poetic career that separated the lotus-world of his Cambridge days from the rest of his life. Yet, a born poet that he was,

3. Charles Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson, p. 144.  
4. Valerie Pitt, Tennyson Laureate, p. 78.
grief flowed through his pen in verse. This to him was his only hope to keep a hold on himself:

But, for the unquiet heart and brain,
A use in measured language lies;
The sad mechanic exercise,
Like dull narcotics, numbing pain.

("In Memoriam," V, 11. 5-8).

Some fruits of this "sad mechanic exercise" are the following poems:

"From Sorrow Sorrow Yet Is Born," "Hark, the Dogs Howl?" "Whispers," "On a Mourner," "Youth," "Oh, that 'twere Possible," "Break, Break, Break," "Ulysses,"
and "In Memoriam," the composition of which was spread over seventeen years. Amongst these poems, "Ulysses," "Tithonus" and "Tiresias" stand out as poems on Greek mythical heroes. "Ulysses" was composed soon after Tennyson got the news of Hallam's death and the other two were also, initially, composed round about the same period, i.e., 1833-34. But "Ulysses" was first published in 1842, "Tithonus" in 1860, and "Tiresias" in 1885. It is rather difficult to point out

5. Christopher Ricks in the headnote to "Ulysses" in The Poems of Tennyson, p. 560, states that it was written soon after Hallam's death. The poem is dated October 20, 1833 in the Heath MS. The news of Hallam's death reached the Tennysons at Somersby on October 1, 1833.
which was the poem or which were the first lines that burst forth when he experienced the agony of the loss on hearing about Hallam's death. But amongst the poems specifically dated, "Ulysses" could be a fair guess as being the first full effusion on a tragedy of this dimension.⁶ Amongst the mythical poems of Tennyson, this poem could be said to mark the junction of the two phases of his poetic career — that of the lotos-world of his Cambridge days, and the rest of his life.

It is noteworthy that Dante is related to both "Ulysses" and "In Memoriam," two poems of rather different genres, yet emanating from the same source of inspiration — Hallam's death. Tennyson had acquired an understanding of Dante from Hallam.⁷ The chief source of "Ulysses" was "Inferno" in The Divine Comedy, though the genesis of the hero himself was in Homer's Odyssey.⁸

Critics have generally conceded that "Ulysses" is a personal allegory. The ambiguity that has remained unresolved, however, lies in the opening passage of the poem. How and

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⁶ The lines, "and vile it were/ For some three days to stare/ and hoard myself" ("Ulysses," ll. 28-29), seem to indicate that after three days of benumbing inactivity at the news, he tried to collect himself and perhaps either began "Ulysses" or contemplated the poem.

⁷ Valerie Pitt, op.cit., p. 114.

⁸ Appendix III, C, pp. 268-271 and Ci, pp. 272-274.
why does the hero of the poet of the hearth and home reject his hearth and home in "Ulysses" and that too when Penelope is no Guinevere, Telemachus is a responsible son, and as per Odyssey Ulysses' father Leartes is still alive. It is this rejection that seems to make the identification of the poet with the hero difficult. His dereliction of duty and yet his justification of it in the words:

It little profits that an idle king,
By this still hearth, among these barren crags;
Matched with an aged wife, I mete and dole
Unequal laws unto a savage race,
That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me.

(ll. 1-5).

has intrigued most of the critics. Baum feels that these lines "hardly avoid the charge of inconsistency."\(^9\) Chiasson says that "Ulysses" may be read as a "dramatic presentation of a man who has faith neither in the gods nor consequently in the necessity of preserving order in his kingdom or his own life."\(^10\) But both these comments run counter to Tennyson's own statement as given by James Knowles: "There is more about myself in 'Ulysses', which was written under the sense of loss and all that had gone by, but that still life must be fought out to the end. It was more written with the feeling of his

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loss upon me than many poems in 'In Memoriam'. This statement clearly indicates that the poem has a deeply subjective note, with each section reflecting some internal turmoil or pain. Bum, Chiasson and critics like them appear to delink Tennyson the poet from Tennyson the man and do not take cognisance of Tennyson's mental state at the time of the composition of the poem. His father's death had created many problems which were aggravated by the death of Hallam. Valerie Pitt points out that after Rev. Dr. Tennyson's death, circumstances forced him to become the head of the Somersby household consisting of brothers and sisters of difficult temperaments, beset with problems of career, marriage, nervous illness etc. Added to this, Frederick, Charles and Alfred were being compelled by their grandfather to take orders instead of going back to Cambridge. Frederick and Alfred were totally unsuited to the clerical profession and opposed the move which caused a great deal of family friction and tension. Still, the household had to be run and individual needs looked after. He had to shoulder the burden of the day-to-day problems of the Somersby home.¹²

In this, and in almost everything "the Somersby household


was overshadowed by the disapproving control exercised from Bayons Manor."^13

Though Tennyson had become the "head of the family" he was a most powerless head for the "purse strings" were controlled by grandfather Tennyson, the "ultimate arbiter,"^14 Charles d'Eyncourt, the favoured son, supported the elder Tennyson's approach in everything about the Somersby Tennysons and thus, when Alfred wanted to go back to Cambridge, there was virtually no one to look up to for support.^15 His total dependence on his grandfather for means to tackle the various problems according to his (grandfather's) wishes, left no room for his own initiative. This must have greatly depressed him.

The difficulties the first five lines of "Ulysses" present to the critics arise because they fail to view Tennyson in the totality of his situation and focus their attention only on the poet's bereavement on Hallam's death. The poem truly has much more about Tennyson than even "In Memoriam," for "In Memoriam" is about his grief, faith and doubt, and the ultimate restoration of his faith. The  

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13. Valerie Pitt, op. cit., p. 79.
14. Ibid., p. 49.
15. Philip Henderson writes, "When Alfred left Cambridge there seemed little likelihood of his returning there to take a degree. 'I told him that it was a useless expense unless he meant to go into the Church', his uncle Charles wrote to Bayons."
autobiographical stanzas of "In Memoriam" that reflect life at Somersby are mostly related to the family in its relationship to Hallam, whereas "Ulysses" reflects the immediate problems confronting Tennyson.

Symbolic mode is Tennyson's favourite style. His statement that there is more about himself in "Ulysses," which was written under the sense of loss and all that had gone by, is but half the truth if looked at merely from the viewpoint of Tennyson's grief on his friend's death. As a matter of fact, this grief had, in a way, aggravated his sorrow on his father's death, and made him feel unbearably lonely in facing the various problems that surrounded him. Tennyson's situation in its totality with his relationships with the rest of the world and his own immediate family is as important as the bereavement in gauging the depth of this cryptic statement. 16 Hallam had been a pillar of strength

16. J.H. Buckley throws light on Tennyson's situation in the following words:

"Tennyson had indeed been close to nervous collapse ever since his father's death in March. His sense of bereavement, greater than he could have anticipated, had led him into a not unfamiliar hypochondria.... A real source of his misery was no doubt the burden of responsibility which had been thrust upon him in his new position as virtual head of the whole uneasy establishment at Somersby. He still wished to return to Cambridge and, in order to do so, was almost willing to satisfy his grandfather's requirement that he plan to enter holy orders. But he knew that he had no 'call' to the Church; ....He considered himself essentially the artist, but, despite the counsel of the Apostles, he was not at all sure how art might sustain society or even give him a means of self-support."

(Tennyson the Growth of a Poet, p.42.)
for him in many ways. He "alone understood his problems, \[and\] strove to fortify in him the sense of dedication."^{17}
And now Hallam too had died.^{18}

Ulysses is the persona of Tennyson, the "King" of Somersby, with its "still hearth," for it has suffered two losses, Dr. Tennyson's, and now Hallam's. This can be

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17. J.H. Buckley, Tennyson the Growth of a Poet, p. 42.

18. Hallam Tennyson in A Memoir, I (p. 72) refers to "the double loss of Tennyson, that of his father and of his friend" in lines incorporated in "In Memoriam":

As down the garden-walks I move,
Two spirits of a diverse love
Contend for loving masterdom.
glimpsed in some passages of "In Memoriam." He is an "idle king" for he has no scope to act on his own initiative and no finance to manage his "kingdom" as he wants to. The

19. The following two stanzas from "In Memoriam" are like an exposition of the phrase "by this still hearth":

For by the hearth the children sit
Cold in that atmosphere of Death,
And scarce endure to draw the breath.
Or like to noiseless phantoms flit:

But open converse is there none,
So much the vital spirits sink
To see the vacant chair, and think,
'How good! how kind! and he is gone'.

(XX, 11. 13-20).

The stanzas given below, also from "In Memoriam," are a reminder of the once joyous household which makes the silence of the present "still hearth" of "Ulysses" come alive by contrast and reflects the full import of the phrase in relation to his own home:

At our old pntimes in the hall
We gambolled, making vain pretence
Of gladness, with an awful sense
Of one mute Shadow watching all.

(XXX, 11. 5-8).

Then echo-like our voices rang;
We sung, though every eye was dim,
A merry song we sang with him
Last year: impetuously we sang:

(XXX, 11. 13-16).
futility of such a situation is sounded in the very first lines of the poem:

It little profits that an idle king,
By this still hearth, among these barren crags
Matched with an aged wife, I mete and dole
Unequal laws unto a savage race,
That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me.

(11. 1-5).

The exacting requirements of looking after his temperamental and difficult siblings, with their ailments, seem to make him turn them, metaphorically, into "a savage race" in the poem. His work is to "mete and dole" "unequal laws" to them. "Unequal," here means, not in the same measure, but dispensation to each according to his need. "Laws" stands for the advice and guidance he must have been giving to his brothers and sisters to reorganize their lives. The word "savage" generally connotes brutality and violence, but it is significant that Ulysses does not accuse the Ithacans of violence. Their only acts of 'savagery' appear to be "to hoard, and feed, and sleep,
and know not me." Weighed down by their own individual maladies, his brothers and sisters, who are akin to the Ithacans, are reduced merely to the level of eating and sleeping, and have become immune to the finer things of life. Tennyson feels that he is wasting his time and talent on them.

20. Valerie Pitt in *Tennyson Laureate*, p. 79, writes about the different maladies and exacting needs of the individuals of the Somersby household of which Tennyson was the head. Septimus and Edward were getting mentally ill, Emily had taken to a "prolonged bout of Gothic suffering."

We can say that they had been reduced to a state in which they could no longer appreciate his poetic genius.

Philip Henderson, in *Tennyson, Poet and Prophet*, p. 90, shows that there was no appreciation of Tennyson's poetic powers by his relations at Bayons Manor. His uncle Charles refused to acknowledge it even when he had been made Poet Laureate. When he heard the news he is reported to have said, "Horrid rubbish indeed! What a discredit it is that British taste and Poetry should have such a representative before the Nations of the Earth and Posterity!"

Keeping this in mind it appears that grandfather Tennyson and uncle Charles could also be included in the metaphor "savage race,/ That hoard and sleep and feed, and know not me," for both of them failed to recognise Tennyson's genius.
The most intriguing phrase, ensconced between these lines is where Ulysses refers to Penelope as "an agéd wife." This could be a phrase picked up from The Heroides of Ovid from Penelope's epistle to Ulysses. She ends the letter with:

As for myself, who when you left my side was but a girl, though you should come straightway, I surely shall seem grown an aged dame. 21

The use Tennyson makes of it imparts realism to the situation of Ulysses and Penelope in the myth. He calls himself and his mariners also "old" — "Free hearts, free foreheads - you and I are old." (line 49). But the reference to Penelope as the 'agéd wife' has a symbolical implication too. It can be taken to stand for the misery that would not leave him. 22 Since as long back as he could remember, there were memories of unwholesome scenes, frayed tempers, a wronged, dipsomaniac father, a silently suffering mother. Then death deprived him of the shelter of his father first, and the strength and solace of his

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22. In "In Memoriam," too, he equates 'sorrow' with wife:

O Sorrow, wilt thou live with me
No casual mistreesse, but a wife,
My bosom-friend and half of life;
As I confess it needs must be ....

(LIX, 11. 1-4)
friend soon after. The "aged wife" therefore, metaphorically, is the ever loyal minstrel, an inseparable partner in life. These lines thus state that he find no substance in such kingship, and hence wants to leave such a kingdom and wife, and go forth in search of new worlds.

In its allegorical mode the poem seems to vacillate between the ironic and the romantic mood. It becomes ironic when the reference is to Tennyson's home life, and poignantly romantic with reference to his own aspirations, dreams, and ambitions which are on the verge of collapse, as he tries desperately to retrieve them. If the first passage, by the mode of indirection, is about his family life, the second (11. 6-32) is an allegorical presentation of the world of intellect in which Tennyson was no less an adventurer than Ulysses was in the physical world. In Somersby he used to explore his father's library and during the Cambridge period, the vast expanse of knowledge that opened up before him at the University, gave him an endless appetite for it. The lines:

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Much have I seen and known: cities of men
And manners, climates, councils, governments,
Myself not least, but honoured of them all;
And drunk delight of battle with my peers,
Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy.
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(11. 13-17)

show the increasing vista of his understanding and knowledge at Cambridge. The company of the Apostles, the pressure of
their creed, the heated debates and endless arguments amongst them were akin to the "delight of battle with my peers," which "Ulysses" was "drunk" with. To be "an idle king," constricted within the confines of a "kingdom" of "barren crags" and "savages" was uninspiring, dull, and oppressive. The world of the mind—seen through the "arch" of his experience, gleams in front of him, tempting him to explore its untravelled regions and not vegetate in this "kingdom." Wasting his time in mundane tasks is not his concept of life. He believes in a full-blooded, active, and fruitful existence, and feels that there is so much to be seen and done in the world that one life is too short a time for it. In his Cambridge days when tragedy had not yet struck him, he had written a sonnet, "Life," reflecting his attitude towards it:

Why suffers human life so soon eclipse?
For I could burst into a psalm of praise,
Seeing the heart so wondrous in her ways,
E'en scorn looks beautiful on human lips!
Would I could pile fresh life on life, and dull
The sharp desire of knowledge still with knowing!
Art, Science, Nature, everything is full,
As my own soul is full, to over flowing —
Millions of forms, and hues, and shades, that give
The difference of all things to the sense,
And all the likeness in the difference.
I thank thee, God, that thou hast made me live:
I reck not for the sorrow or the strife;
One only joy I know, the joy of life. 23

Allegorically, the second passage of "Ulysses," then, can be said to hark back to Tennyson's Cambridge days with all its varied experiences. The poet scorns inactivity but it has been forced upon him in the role of "an idle king," and he moans:

How dull it is to pause, to make an end,
To rust unburnished, not to shine in use!
As though to breathe were life.

(11. 22-24).

In "The Two Voices" he declares:

'Whatever crazy sorrow saith,
No life that breathes with human breath
Has ever truly long'd for death,
'Tis life, whereof our nerves are scant,
Oh life, not death, for which we pant;
More life, and fuller, that I want.'

(11. 394-399).

The object of this life, as set at the end of the passage in "Ulysses," is a romantic ideal which incorporates the ideal of the Cambridge enthusiasts. It is

To follow knowledge like a sinking star,
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.

(11. 31-32)

24. "If the absorption into the divine in after-life be the creed of some, let them at all events allow us many existences of individuality before this absorption; since this short-lived individuality seems to be but too short a preparation for so mighty a union."

(Tennyson's statement quoted by Hallam Tennyson in A Memoir, I, p. 319).
But in his other poems Tennyson has always shown a distrust of pure, unalloyed knowledge. The theory of evolution based on the knowledge of Geology had already struck at the very foundation of the Biblical concept of creation. This made him feel insecure and restless. This sense of insecurity was intensified by Hallam's death. He was in dire need of some support. He was afraid of the outcome of pure knowledge and yet the goal he set for Ulysses was that of 'Knowledge.' In the "Prologue" to "In Memoriam" he says:

> Let knowledge grow from more to more,
> But more of reverence in us dwell;
>
> (1. 25-26).

He felt that though "knowledge" was attractive it was still in its infancy. For a healthy growth beneficial to mankind it needed curbs, controls, and careful channelization. He said he was not against the thirst for knowledge that had gripped the age, but he felt that an uncontrolled and undirected passion for it could spell disaster for it had in it great potential for harm. In "In Memoriam" he writes:

25. In "Parnassus" the poet shows his fear of Astronomy and Geology and calls them "terrible Muses." The latter was responsible for Darwin's theory of evolution.

The doubts and uncertainty the new investigations and scientific researches created in his mind are recorded in "The Supposed Confessions of a Second Rate Sensitive Mind," which is printed in *The Poems of Tennyson*, pp.197-202.
Who loves not knowledge? Who shall rail
Against her beauty? May she mix
With men and prosper! Who shall fix
Her pillars? Let her work prevail.

But on her forehead sits a fire:
She sets her forward countenance
And leaps into the future chance,
Submitting all things to desire.

Half-grown as yet, a child, and vain—
She cannot fight the fear of death,
What is she, cut from love and faith,
But some wild Pallas from the brain

Of Demons? fiery-hot to burst
All barriers in her onward race
For power. Let her know her place;
She is the second, not the first.

A higher hand must make her mild,
If all be not in vain; and guide
Her footsteps, moving side by side
With wisdom, like the younger child;

(CXIV, 11. 1-20).

Why was it then that he made knowledge alone the goal of
Ulysses? Was it simply because his Ulysses was drawn from
Dante?

It is possible that the romantic urge to follow a
goal like knowledge was rooted in Dante, but critics have
failed to see that here, too, Tennyson is careful to make
knowledge subordinate to wisdom. This becomes clear from
a comparison of the commencement of the voyages of the heroes
of the two poems. Dante's Ulysses starts his voyage at dawn
and sails towards the East: " ... To the dawn/ Our poop
we turn'd....** Contrasted with this, Tennyson's Ulysses gets ready to set sail in the evening and turns his ship to the West:

The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks:
The long day wanes : the slow moon climbs : the deep Moans round with many voices....

(11. 54-56).

He tells his sailor friends his goal, "... my purpose holds/ To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths/ Of all the western stars, until I die." (11. 59-61). We find that Tennyson's and Dante's Ulysses take opposite directions, at totally different times of the day, though both choose the same objective--"to follow knowledge." What could have made Tennyson be at variance with Dante? It appears that Dante was voicing the pure Renaissance spirit of enquiry while Tennyson belonged to an age confronted with some of the results of such an enquiry. Many of its findings posed a challenge to the established concepts of Christianity. This caused confusion in the minds of the people who were afraid of losing their moorings at this onslaught of knowledge on their faith and beliefs. To Tennyson "wisdom" and "reverence" appeared to be the two tenets that could maintain a healthy balance and check the possible offshoots

of knowledge from harming the fabric of society. By turning his ship to the West he symbolically turned towards the treasure house of "wisdom,"^{27} to pursue knowledge through the path of wisdom. There is no dichotomy here because in pursuit of the one he has chosen the path that goes through the other. Knowledge is, in this way, tempered with wisdom.

Ulysses' address to his mariners in Tennyson's poem is imbued with the poet's own subjective experience. This is in contrast to Dante's Ulysses. Dante's Ulysses, in the "Inferno," narrates to Virgil and Dante how he prepared his mariners to undertake this last voyage:

'O brothers', I began, 'who to the west
Through perils without number now have reach'd;
To this short remaining watch, that yet
Our senses have to wake, refuse not proof
Of the unpeopled world, following the track
Of Phoebus. Call to mind from whence ye sprang;
Ye were not form'd to live the life of brutes
But virtue to pursue and knowledge high'. 28

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27. "The East is the common day of human action; the West is the evening of a consecrated half-light, of mystery and quiet contemplation and 'hoarded wisdom.'"


In "The Hesperides" the three sisters sing as they guard the "golden apples": "...watch the treasure/
Of the wisdom of the west." (11. 26-27)
Thus "wisdom" lies in the West.

Tennyson's Ulysses almost cajoles them affectionately, reminding them of their happy togetherness in the past:

... My mariners,
Souls that have toiled, and wrought and thought with me-
That ever with a frolic welcome took
The thunder and the sunshine, and opposed
Free hearts, free foreheads - you and I are old;
Old age hath yet his honour and his toil;
Death closes all: but something ere the end....

(11. 45-51)

... Come, my friends,
'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.

(11. 56-57).

Just as Ulysses is the persona of Tennyson, the mariners may be said to stand for the rest of the Somersby set, with Emily at their head. The lines hark back to their close companionship in the past. They were the souls who "with a frolic welcome took/ The thunder and the sunshine" at Somersby. Hallam's death had hit them hard but for "Alfred and Emily the blow was overwhelming." Ulysses' address to the mariners appears to be more in the nature of Tennyson tenderly coaxing his sister to help her to pick up the threads of life once again.

29. Hallam Tennyson, A Memoir I, pp. 4-5, describes how the Tennyson brothers and sisters enjoyed their imaginative games together—mock tournaments, writing tales and putting them under vegetable dishes at dinner "to be read aloud when it was over," or Alfred with young Cecilia on his knee, Mathilda, Arthur and the other young brothers and sisters surrounding him, listened to his fascinating tales by the fireside in winters.

30. Charles Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson, p. 145.
Ensconced between the two passages just discussed is a rather small para of about ten lines (11. 33-43) wherein Ulysses justifies leaving the burden of administering the kingdom on the shoulders of Telemachus. It has made critics charge him with not only justifying dereliction of duty but showing a positive contempt for it. Baum finds him "diplomatic, at the very least, when he changes 'savage race' to 'rugged people'." In his (Baum's) view the "description of Telemachus as 'Most blameless', devoted to 'common duties', as 'decent not to fail' in tenderness and in worship of 'my household gods', has an air of condescension with a tinge of contempt. His words, 'the useful and the good', become almost sarcasm. When he dismisses Telemachus with 'He works his work, I mine', it is hard to miss a note of polite scorn."31

Baum has detected the right tones, but since his attention was perhaps fixed mainly on the mythical hero and his son, he has missed the target this contempt was directed at, i.e., Tennyson's uncle Charles and grandfather Tennyson. Telemachus appears to symbolise the favoured son—Tennyson's uncle, Charles d'Eyncourt. The lines

31. P.F. Baum, Tennyson Sixty Years After, p. 301.
This is my son, mine own Telemachus,
To whom I leave the sceptre and the isle-
Well-loved of me, discerning to fulfil
This labour, by slow prudence to make mild
A rugged people, and through soft degrees
Subdue them to the useful and the good.

(11. 33-58)

are an ironic comment on the impression grandfather Tennyson
had about his favoured son in particular and the Somersby
Tennysons in general. Old Mr. Tennyson and the other
incumbents of Bayons Manor considered the Somersby Tennysons
to be uncouth. The whole passage from lines 33 to 43,
where it closes with "He works his work, I mine," is a
veiled criticism of the elder Tennyson who is, in effect,
the real master of the show with Charles d' Eyncourt playing
his tune. Alfred as the redundant "idle king" is no longer
prepared to mope in this "silent hearth" but wishes to
employ himself in a task after his heart. His uncle
Charles, at the behest of old Mr. Tennyson, is handling
the family at Somersby, and never fails in paying "meet
adoration" to this worthy (old Mr. Tennyson), the "household
god" of both the branches of the Tennysons. The appreciation
of the father and son is reciprocal. It is he (Charles d'
Eyncourt) who is considered by Tennyson's grandfather to
be endowed with "hard headed practicality [which] promised
better to preserve and augment the fortunes of
Bayons Manor." Both father and son were responsible for the troubles at Somersby which stemmed mainly from the injustice perpetrated on the elder son. Later, too, they showed little understanding in the control they exercised over the lives and finances of the elder son, Rev. Tennyson's family. From behind the thin veil of the persona of Ulysses, Tennyson declares his intention to remove himself from the scene altogether. The personal allegory reflects Tennyson's real situation—the grief that gnawed at his heart, the trouble ridden house, and his own helplessness in setting things right. The situation had the potential of bringing to naught his life-long ambition of becoming a great poet, and hence the compulsion of extricating himself from it so that

Some work of noble note, may yet be done,
Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods.

(11. 52-53).

It is in this respect that "Ulysses" gives out the poet's feelings about "the need of going forward, and braving the struggle of life," as Tennyson says, "perhaps more simply

32. J.H. Buckley, Tennyson the Growth of a Poet, p. 3.

The text of footnote 15 ante of this chapter is an example of how Charles supported and implemented all that his father said, specially as regards the Somersby Tennysons.
than any thing in 'In Memoriam'. "Ulysses" expresses the determination of the poet to fulfil his aspirations, however grave "the sense of loss" under which the effort is going to be made. As Valerie Pitt puts it:

His grief for Hallam jerked him into a realisation of his choice, the realisation of what it meant to live in the real world in relationship to others of his own kind. 34

Supporting Miss Green's analysis as a cogent assessment of Tennyson's mood, Pitt says that the new theme of Tennyson was "a determination to face and not to escape the world." 35 He was now, "to strive, to seek, to find," the truth of life through his higher poetic vision, and was "not to yield"

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34. Valerie Pitt, Tennyson Laureate, pp. 124-125.
35. Ibid., pp. 125. Pitt gives Miss Green's argument from the latter's essay "Tennyson's development during the 'Ten Years Silence'" (P.M.L.A., LXVI, 1951). Pitt writes:

"Miss Joyce Green, in an essay on the revisions of the 1832 volume, shows how Tennyson's intention in collecting and arranging all this work for the 1842 volume was not so much to placate or satisfy the critics of his earlier work, as to present a collection of poems which should be homogenous in tone and theme. The tone and theme of such a collection would, of course, be dictated by Tennyson's mood in the late thirties and not by that of his undergraduate years. This would require considerable revision of the undergraduate poems, and Miss Green, in a compelling analysis, shows how these revisions support Tennyson's new theme of a determination to face and not to escape the world. The new collection of poems was both to satisfy Tennyson's aesthetic conscience and his moral determination not to withdraw from the world into the weak indulgence of sorrow. The most telling evidence which Miss Green offers for her thesis is the withdrawal of "The Hesperides" not only from the 1842 volume but from all subsequent editions of Poems issued in Tennyson's life time." (pp. 125-126).
to any debilitating sorrow and then withdraw into a "Palace of Art." With a new "moral determination" he was bent upon satisfying his "aesthetic conscience." This is what Hallam had urged him to do. The fulfilment of his friend's desire might have seemed to him to be a way of meeting his lost friend, which, it can be said, is metaphorically expressed in "It may be we shall touch the Happy Inlen,/ And see the bright Achillion whom we know." (11. 63-64).

The arousal of the aesthetic conscience of the poet brings to the fore the question of the position of the artist as projected in this poem. In the 'Choric Songs' (Chapter I), the world of pure art has been symbolically represented as a garden island, fringed with mountains, with cascading cataracts, flowing streams and fountains. Enchantment and mystery pervade the whole atmosphere as heavenly nymph-like beautiful maidens—the Sea Fairies or the Hesperides sing continuously, or the mariners relax on the lush green isles and sing with contentment and joy. The singers, as has been argued in the chapter on the Choric Songs, are akin to the Muses, and the islands are symbolic of the abode of gods. The calm sea is the sea of life. The mariners, when on the sea, represent the uncertain artist who is magnetically drawn towards the enchanting island.
This island is the home of the Muses and symbolizes pure art—the world of art-for-art's sake, where Tennyson had often taken refuge and which he was reluctant to leave.

We have earlier established that Hallam's death was one single event that had in a significant way determined the course of his mind.\(^\text{36}\) The course that he now seems to have adopted is to free himself from the hold of pure art and devote his energy to purposeful poetry. The phase of self-indulgent langour by escaping into art is now over. This change is brought about by the shock of Hallam's death.\(^\text{37}\) The transformation, it may be said, is symbolically expressed in "Ulysses." The island, the mountains, the sea, the mariners—all figure in it as they do in "The Sea-Fairies," "The Lotos-Eaters," and "The Hesperides." The music and the Muse, too, are there but just as the mirror of the Lady of Shalott "cracked" and the magic web "flew" as soon as she "looked down at Camelot," it can be said that the symbols of his Muse's abode are transformed into the sterile "barren crags" of Ithaca at the shock of Hallam's death.

\(^{36}\) Valerie Pitt, Tennyson Laureate, p. 78.

\(^{37}\) "Hallam's life no less than Hallam's death had left its mark on his personality. In five years of a sane friendship the world of fantasy had lost its compelling power. The fragile escape worlds of the Arabian Gardens and the Merman's taverns were closed to Tennyson in his new grief; he had to endure what he could not now avoid." (Ibid., p. 121).
death. The spell of self-indulgent art is broken. The lush green island (with its mountains, streams, and fountains) of his dream world now shows up its reality as a bleak Ithaca. The singing of the choric songs is contrasted with the "still hearth" of this poem. The consciousness of silence is a realization of the absence of music. The beautiful nymphs, symbolic Muses, are replaced by an "aged wife," bereft of charm. The implication clearly is that this is the reality of what the artist had mistakenly taken to be a beautiful haven of retreat under the hold of some romantic charm. Confronted with the truth of the situation he decides to set sail again on the sea of life with the mission of a search for knowledge. This can be a search for the knowledge of life itself, with its good and evil. Since his path lies through the West, the abode of "wisdom," this search will be monitored by it.

An interesting and significant aspect of Tennyson's Ithaca is that from amongst his sources for this poem, Dante does not mention Ithaca at all while Homer's Ithaca, as shown by Sargeaunt, has all the potential of being cast in the mould of Tennyson's favourite isles like those
of the 'Choric Songs.'\(^{38}\) But since Tennyson's trance has been broken, for him the forest-covered peaks of Ithaca's Mount Neriton no longer seem rich with greenery. They have become its "barren crags."

Apart from projecting the chastened artist through the myth, Tennyson makes it reflective of the widening horizons of the mind in the nineteenth century. Sargeaunt says that the value of the poem "is founded securely on the life of the modern world. As knowledge increases and spreads, men see more and more of the 'unharvested' sea of experience stretching in front of them;... they are saddened with the thought of the brevity of their experience...."\(^{39}\) The search for knowledge, reflective of the great advances made in his time which opened new vistas for still greater ones, ad infinitum, from the secrets of the mind to the secrets of stars and the secrets in the bowels of the earth.

38. G.M. Sargeaunt in his essay, "The Eternal Wanderer," Classical Studies (1929), pp.13-14-15, shows that Homer's Ulysses applies the epithet "sweet" to this island. There is the mountain Neriton "with trembling forest leaves, standing manifest to view." There are "the long paths and the sheltering havens and steep rocks and trees in their bloom." There is also "a pleasant cave and shadowy, sacred to the nymphs; and there moreover do bees hive, And there are great looms of stone whereon the nymphs weave raiment of purple stain, a marvel to behold, and therein are waters welling evermore." There is "the fair flowing spring with a basin fashioned, whence the people of the city drew water.... Around it was a thicket of alders that grow by the waters all circwise, and down the cold stream fell from a rock on high."

Ulysses expresses it thus:

I am part of all that I have met;
Yet all experience in an arch where through
Gleams that untravelled world, whose margin fades
For ever and for ever when I move.

(11. 18-21).

"Ulysses," as a myth recast by Tennyson, appears to have borrowed almost nothing from Homer except the figure of Ulysses. His debt to Dante, though somewhat greater, does not amount to a re-narration of Dante's story either. 40 He has narrated no story at all for his tale begins and ends with the intention of Ulysses' undertaking a new voyage. The poem reads like a preamble to a tale of which Ulysses is the hero. Tennyson's Ulysses is often criticized for cursorily brushing aside Penelope as an "aged wife" in favour of his new pursuit. Critics have found Ulysses' treatment of Penelope indefensible. Dante's Ulysses, at least, is not self-righteous whereas Tennyson's is. Why does the poet portray him as such a hard hearted husband? It is well known that in classical epical literature heroes are depicted as polygamous. Those were the days when women were part of the booty of war. The whole of Iliad is based on the quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon over Briseis. As for desertion—Aeneas' desertion of Dido, Jason's of Medea, Paris' of Oenone, with the devastation that followed

40. A perusal of Appendix III, C and Cl, pp.268-274 will support it.
in its wake, are but a few examples of the general attitude of men towards women. The protagonist Tennyson is portraying hero as a man of action and vast experience and in from the epic world of the classics. He is the beloved of beautiful Calypso and Circe, and admired by princess Nausicaa, who, like Desdemona, listens to his tales of adventure at her father's court. Though, with an adamantine will, he manages to reach Ithaca, vanquishes Penelope's suitors, and re-establishes his claim on his kingdom and his wife, it can be said that he took the risks and bore the hardships not merely for Penelope but for his own reputation as well. His honour and his kingdom were at stake. He retrieved both with glory. As for his disenchantment with Penelope, there was nothing unusual in deserting one woman after another in those days, specially for a hero like Ulysses. He had left Penelope twenty years earlier when he undertook the Trojan adventure. Then he left Calypso and later Circe and now he decides to leave Penelope again for a fresh adventure. It may be recalled that in this poem Tennyson is portraying Ulysses and not Penelope and hence the focus is on Ulysses' feelings. The very charge of insensitivity on Ulysses embodies a compliment to the sensibility of the poet for the perceptive eye. It is an established fact that when Tennyson takes up a subject,
he also takes up its "name, feelings, nerves, and brain" along with the name and local habitation. In taking up Ulysses, Tennyson takes up the hero's possible attitude towards women as well. Thus, the new "sea-fever" that is gripping him can no longer be stayed by a wife who has lost her youth and beauty. To blame him for being heartless is to judge the mythical hero by the nineteenth and twentieth century standards of social behaviour and morality.

If "Ulysses" in a poem, inspired by the poet's realization of "the need of going forward and braving the struggle of life," "Tithonus" is a plea for being freed from it. "Ulysses" was composed in the first flush of sorrow and the urgency of overcoming it, and "Tithonus," as a "pendent" to it, was written about the same time. While "Tithonus" may be said to be the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings," "Tithonus" presents an emotion "recollected in tranquility," for it is a revised version of the former, after a lapse of

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about a quarter century.\footnote{Ricks in Tennyson, (p. 128), writes that Tennyson's mind turned to it when Jowett wrote to him, after a visit to Hallam's grave, that it brought on him the disturbing and strange realization that "while we are getting old and dusty they are as they were."}

"Tithonus" is not so much a symbolical portrayal of Tennyson's love for Hallam as of "the grief of Tennyson's sister Emily..."\footnote{Donahue writes that "Tithon" underwent revision in 1859 on Thackeray's urgent request for a poem for the "Cornhill" publication.}

Her condition was a constant cause of anxiety to the poet. When he was at Kitlands she had written to him that her health had become worse since his departure and at times she had felt the "chilly hand of death" upon her. More than nine months had elapsed since Hallam's death but she still seemed to be buried under "a grave of tears" and longed for death. A stanza in "In Memoriam" shows the grief as equally shared by both:

O what to her shall be the end?
And what to me remains of good?
To her, perpetual maidenhood,
And unto me no second friend.

(VI, 11. 41-44)

\footnote{"Tennyson's 'Hail, Briton!' and 'Tithon' in the Heath Manuscript," \textit{op. cit.}, p. 400.}

43. Ricks in \textit{Tennyson}, (p. 128), writes that Tennyson's mind turned to it when Jowett wrote to him, after a visit to Hallam's grave, that it brought on him the disturbing and strange realization that "while we are getting old and dusty they are as they were."

44. Ricks, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 128.
It seems that while the figure of Ulysses emerged from the past as an emblem of courage, Emily's condition conjured up the image of Tithonus, longing to die, yet forced to live. While "Ulysses" embodies the urge for "life in death," "Tithonus" represents the experience of "death in life," for immortality is not necessarily a boon.

Tennyson's sources for the myth of this poem are "Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite" and two of Horace's odes. He utilizes this myth to highlight the ironic aspect of immortality, coveted by us mortals. As is his wont, he does not re-narrate the myth but explores the crisis it contains. There are two versions of the myth. The one which shows Tithonus changed into a grasshopper is already discredited by him in an earlier poem—"The Grasshopper." The myth, as given in the Homeric Hymn, outlines the story of Eos' love for Tithonus. It is overweighted with the golden glory of the gods and reveals the casual manner of the goddess' granting immortality to Tithonus. It causes him immense suffering but this is not glossed over in the hymn. A cryptic, "he babbles endlessly, and no more has strength at

45. The Poems of Tennyson, p. 1113.

46. Ibid., pp. 234-235. In "The Grasshopper" Tennyson says: "No Tithon thou as poets feign/(Shame fall 'em they are deaf and blind)" (ll. 5-6).
all, such as once he had in his supple limbs" does away with his plight. Tennyson's perception discovers the potential of the frightful prospect of a life of eternal decay. With his keen sensibility and dramatic power he explores it.

The tone of the poem and the time of its composition indicate clearly its deep, subjective, undertones. The poem takes on the hue of an emotionally charged personal allegory. "Ulysses" is a veritable epitome of indomitable will and an unquenchable thirst for a life of action till the last moment of death. "Tithonus" is the obverse of "Ulysses." If Ulysses has too little of "life," Tithonus has too much of it. He envies things "blessed" with mortality, as he surveys things having the power to die:

The woods decay, the woods decay and fall, 
The vapours weep their burthen to the ground, 
Man comes and tills the field and lies beneath, 
And after many a summer dies the swan.

(ll. 1-4).

He complains that he alone has been singled out by "cruel" immortality to "wither slowly" yet not die. Yoked to immortality, without the concommitent blessing of "eternal youth," while the rest of the life forms are consumed by death, he ironically, is "consumed" by "life."

47. Appendix III, Cii, p.275.
Me only cruel Immortality
Consumes: I wither slowly in thine arms,
Here at the quiet limit of the world,
A white-haired shadow roaming like a dream
The ever-silent spaces of the East,...

(ll. 5-9)

The lines seem to very strongly suggest Emily who had become a shadow of her former self and yearned for death at each moment of her life. From now onwards Hallam would always remain youthful in her memory, but like Tithon she would wane and wither, compelled "To live confronted with eternal youth:/ To look on what is beautiful nor know/

Tennyson's empathy must have made him experience each moment of his sister's agony. Hallam was out of reach of the ravage of time—Emily and the poet were inextricably caught in its meshes. The allegorical note is obvious. The pathetic pleading of Tithonus for release from such a life can be construed as that of Emily's, through the persona of Tithonus, as he wails:

Or let me call thy ministers, the hours,
To take me up, to wind me in their arms,
To shoot the sunny interval of day,
And lap me deep within the lonely west.

("Tithon," ll. 24-27).

48. "In consequence of her sudden and terrible grief my aunt Emily was ill for many months, and very slowly recovered. 'We were waiting for her', writes one of her friends, 'in the drawing room the first day since her loss that she had been able to meet anyone, and she came at last, dressed in deep mourning, a shadow of her former self!...'"

(A Memoir, I, pp. 108-109)
These lines are part of the first composition of the poem as "Tithon" during the "Ulysses" period. The revision they underwent twenty-five years later is significant:

But thy strong Hours indignant worked their wills,
And beat me down and maimed and wasted me,
And though they could not end me, left me maimed
To dwell in presence of immortal youth,
Immortal age beside immortal youth,
And all I was in ashes.

("Tithonus," ll. 18-23).

On the artistic plane they are definitely superior to the former as they show the invincible "Hours" disfigure, maim, and weaken Tithonus, without actually killing him. But, with subtle artistry, they also reflect the process of aging and weakening of the physical faculties with the passage of time. The retouched lines are an imaginative polishing of the frieze of sorrow by the aging poet. The death wish of the earlier lines in "Tithon" is replaced by a description of the havoc wrought on him by "life" for his failing to die.

As a restructured myth the poem's sole concern is the bane of immortality. It begins and ends with the plight of old Tithonus' endless aging and endless life, ignoring the rest of the narration of the original myth. The poem comes to an end without resolving Tithonus' predicament. It is thus as fragmentary in nature as his other mythical poems. The Homeric Hymn merely states the plight of Tithonus. The
poet enriches this myth by bringing to bear on it his cogitations on life and death. Horace is the source of these reflections. The Roman poet says that whatever the status or virtues of a person, be he a scholar, or friend, or confidante, or beloved of gods, death for him is inevitable and desirable, just as it is for other common mortals. Citing the example of Achilles and Tithonus he writes:

Brief was Achilles' life, but great his fame!
Tithonus wastes and wastes, but still must live.

Like Tennyson's other mythical poems, this poem also throws light on the position of the artist. But in this poem he employs the symbols of East and West, Phospher and Honpor, light and dark, morning and night. Both Stange and Waterston have stated that Tennyson uses words related to East and light to connote work, action, life, and hope. Words related to West and dark are associated with quiet, peace, death, and silent regeneration. This myth is about

49. Appendix III, Ciii(a) pp. 275-277 and Ciii(b) pp. 277-279.
50. Ibid., Ciii(b), p. 272.

Eos or Aurora, the goddess of dawn, who was charmed by the godlike beauty of Tithonus—a mortal—and fell in love with him. He reciprocated. The 'Choric Songs' show Tennyson delighting in losing himself in art, unmindful of the responsibilities the vocation of an artist entailed. In "The Lotus Eaters" this is expressed by the mariners' surrendering themselves to the joy of art depicted by their relishing the lotos-fruit on the Lotos-Isle. Their life after this is akin to the pleasure-filled life of the gods in their abodes. Tithonus, literally, resides in the abode of goddess Eos, in the "halls of the East" and loses himself in her love. E.D.H. Johnson observes that Eos stands for the Keatsian ideal of beauty which holds the poet in bondage.

He loses himself in her love. This poem, too, is a symbolic representation of Tennyson's aesthetic philosophy. Commenting on the lines quoted below Johnson observes "Tithonus remembers the first thrilling visitations of the creative impulse";

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Ay me! ay me! with what another heart
In days far-off, and with what other eyes
I used to watch— if I be he that watched—
The lucid outline forming round thee; saw
The dim curls kindle into sunny rings;
Changed with thy mystic change, and felt my blood
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53. Ibid.
Glow with the glow that slowly crimsoned all
Thy presence and thy portals, while I lay,
Mouth, forehead, eyelids, growing dewy-warm
With kisses balmy than half-opening buds
Of April, and could hear the lips that kissed
Whispering I knew not what of wild and sweet,
Like that strange song I heard Apollo sing,
While Ilion like a mist rose into towers.

(11. 50-63)

It can then be said that in keeping with the mythical
metaphor adopted for the interpretation of the 'Choric Songs'
for this study, Eos is akin to the Muses. "Ulysses" shows
that when the spell is broken, the place of the hero's
happy sojourn is transformed from an illusion of grace and
beauty into the truth of what it is—a region of "barren
crags" inhabited by "savages." The charm of Tithonus, too,
is broken but in a different way. The poem can be interpreted
as being symbolic of the two stages in the life of the artist,
that of the Lotos-Isle, and its eventual conversion into a
bleak Ithaca. With "East" and "Dawn" equated to work, and
work equated to poetic creativity, the love between Tithonus
and Eos may be treated as a poetic version of the devotion
of an artist (here Tennyson) to his Muse. The lines describ-
ing the love between the goddess and Tithonus allude to
Apollo's music which brought into being the towers of Ilion.
They seem to hark back to the days of the poet's infatuation,
his total involvement in and commitment to art, to the
exclusion of all else, during his Cambridge days. He too,
like Apollo, had tried to build "faerie" cities to his music, but that ebullience had died out with the death of Hallam. The loss of his friend seems to age him metaphysically and stands between him and that faerie world of art just as Tithonus' age stood between him and Eos, reducing him to a bare shadow of his former self—forsaken, forlorn, weak, and condemned to endless wasting. The warmth of the love of Eos could no longer dispel the benumbing coldness and indifference within him towards his earlier self-indulgent dedication. The symbolic depiction of this apathy has been managed through the opposition between "warmth" and "cold" with their connotations of "life" and "death". The "glow" of dawn that once infused warmth in him is now "cold" and the "lights" are "cold" as are his wasted and "wrinkled" feet. The poet says that "the gleaming halls of morn" can no longer promise any true dawn for Tithonus."  

54. In "Ilion, Ilion," a fragment of his Cambridge days (discussed in Ch.IV, pp.152-154), we can say that the poet's desire of another Ilion contains the implied though unuttered ambition of creating one himself.

55. Ricks, Tennyson, p. 130.
of the last green island of the 'Choræ Julianæ' into the "still hearth" and "barren crags" of Ithaca. The mood in the poem is the suicidal mood of "The Two Voices":

Thou art so steeped in misery,  
Surely 'twere better not to be.  

(ll. 47-48).

The poet here depicts revulsion from the terms of life and health and gives vent to a yearning for death. "Tithonus" projects an image of "death in life." A permanent release from such a thraldom is sought and the protagonist pleads:

Thou seest all things, thou wilt see my grave:  
Thou wilt renew thy beauty morn by morn;  
I earth in earth forget these empty courts,  
And thee returning on thy silver wheels.  

(ll. 73-76)

The phrase "earth in earth" reminds one of the Biblical curse of God: "for dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return." In order to safeguard against such an interpretation Tennyson is careful to point out that Dante's Paradiso is his source. There is a significant difference between the Biblical and Dantesque implications. While there


58. The Poems of Tennyson, p.1118. In note 75 Kicks writes: "Trinity 1st draft ended with this line; ...T. quotes 'terr in terra (Dante)'...T.'s reference is to Paradiso XXV 124-6:...'(My body is earth in earth, and it will be there with the rest till our number tallies with the eternal purpose.')"
in nothing further to be hoped for after man's final return to "dust" according to the former, Dante's lines contain an indication of regeneration at some future time for there is a 'wait' for "the eternal purpose." In "The Poet" Tennyson says that poetry is like the seeds of a field flower: "Then, like the arrow-seeds of the field flower,/ The fruitful wit/Cleaving, took root...." (ll. 19-21). The implication can be said to be that the poet's response to art, wan and faint at present, might for a time remain buried, be "earth in earth," and patiently regenerate itself for some possible future revival (its purpose) like seeds of the field flower. Ulysses has rejected Ithaca but does harbour a faint hope of coming across "the Blessed Isles" and meeting "Achilles" once again. Tithonus, too, hopes to get rest and possibly new life on being restored to the ground by being amidst the "grassy barrows of the happier dead."

"Tithonus" projects yet another aspect of Tennyson's treatment of Greek myths. The pantheon of Greek gods in Tennyson's mythical panorama of "Oenone," "The Lotus-Eaters," and "Demeter and Persephone" are an epicurian lot, proud, jealous, and generally ranged against each other. In "Ulysses," however, the sole purpose of the "household gods" is to have a surety of "meet adoration" and Telemachus will dutifully
give it. In "Tiresias," the vengefulness of the gods will come to the fore again. In "Tithonus" Tennyson has modified the original mythical Eos where she heartlessly locks Tithonus up to let him 'babble' till eternity.\textsuperscript{59} His Eos, instead, sheds helpless tears which are still on Tithonus' cheeks, for "The Gods themselves cannot recall their gifts." (line 49). Since Tennyson's Eos is the persona of Hallam, he could not possibly make her indifferent like her Greek original. But whether sympathetic or not, the pagan gods do not seem to do any good to mankind. It may be said that by choosing Dante's "terra in terra" (earth in earth), and giving it the implication of regeneration, the poet incorporates the Christian message of hope similar to the one contained in "Demeter and Persephone," when Demeter blesses the fields and flowers, after getting her daughter back. The poem, inspired by Hallam's death and his sister's bereavement, was an attempt to seek answers to the poet's questions on life and death. He perhaps feels that the consolation and faith offered by Christianity is salubrious for mankind. It stood for a life of duty which the poet was to uphold in art as well, instead of indulging in the sensual pleasure of art-for-art's sake as he had been doing till now. In "Tiresias" the Christian undertones

\textsuperscript{59} Appendix III, Cii, p.275.
are more strongly pronounced.

Tennyson's frame for this poem appears to be the justification of death in a mortal world. Not only is it relevant to life, it is one of its basic essentials:

Why should a man desire in any way
To vary from the kindly race of men,
Or pass beyond the goal of ordinance
Where all should pause, as is most meet for all?

(11.28-31)

Death is the law of nature. It should be accepted as such. Besides, a mere continuation of breathing is not life, just as its termination is not necessarily death. The last poem of this set—"Tiresias"—takes up this theme.

The undercurrents of a palpable sorrow in "Ulysses" and "Tithonus" seem to weaken somewhat in "Tiresias."

Although the poem's conception was contemporaneous with the other two, it was revised and given its final form half a century after its first composition. The poem was possibly composed in three parts which were later joined.

60. The Poems of Tennyson, p. 568.
This poem, too, is a personal allegory. The first part of the first verse paragraph can be said to recall his boyhood. With 'eyes of wonder' he tries to understand his own being and explores at will the countryside around Somersby and Mablethorpe:

These eyes, now dull, but then so keen to seek
The meanings ambushed under all they saw,
The flight of birds, the flame of sacrifice,
What omens may foreshadow fate to man
And woman, and the secret of the Gods.

(11. 4-8)

61. The Poems of Tennyson, p.568.

In his discussion of the poem, on the basis of its different sections appearing in different Tennyson note books, Ricks conjectures that the published poem was not composed as one continuous whole. It was written in three sections. He does not specify the length of the opening section but writes that the second section comprises lines 82-145. He surmises that both of them were composed during the 'Ulysses' period. The last section consisting of lines 160 till the end, is in Tennyson's late hand and it could be said on the authority of Tennyson's wife Emily, and friend F.T.Palgrave, that this section was composed at the time of its revision in 1883. It was published in 1885.

62. Charles Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson, pp. 35-36.
In the lines that follow:

My son, the Gods despite of human prayer,
Are slower to forgive than human kings.
The great God, Arès, burns in anger still
Against the guiltless heirs of him from Tyre,
Our Cadmus, out of whom thou art,...

(ll. 9-13)

the phrase "the guiltless heirs" suggests the family feud
born of an injustice perpetrated by Tennyson's grandfather
on his e¿dest son, which had made the rightful "heir" and
his progeny suffer immense hardship and misery. The god
Arès may be taken to symbolize grandfather Tennyson, -- the
supreme authority as head of the family--and the "guiltless

63. Dr. Tennyson's "primogeniture had been slighted" and
consequently his relations with his father gradually
worsened till, round about 1820 they "became morbidly
irreparable." Ricks quotes at length a letter written
by Dr. Tennyson to his father and comments: "It is a
letter whose pain, fragility, and dignity are touching.
It is the letter of a son whose father had done him the
greatest injury of all: making it superhumanly difficult
for him to treat his own sons with 'that consideration
and kindness which a son has a right to expect from a
father'."

(See Ricks, Tennyson, pp.4-5-6).

"Meanwhile Dr. Tennyson could only contrast his own
lot with that of his younger brother Charles, his
father's favourite, with his rich wife, a house in
Park Street, Westminster, and an affectionate welcome
whenever he chose to visit Bayon's Manor. Indeed the
glaring discrepancy between his father's treatment of
Charles and himself, when, after all, he was the
rightful heir and should have had first consideration,
but had only unkindness and brutal rebuffs, weighed
increasingly on the doctor's mind as his health declined."

(Philip Henderson, Tennyson, Poet and Prophet, p. 5).
heirs" then are the Tennyon brothers and sister at Somersby. Cadmus can be said to stand for Dr. George Clayton Tennyson, the father of the poet. The poet sets the tone of the first part of the poem with the legend of Arê's anger with Cadmus for killing the dragon by the springs of Dirce. He then moves on to describe his own encounter with the goddess Pallas Athene and its disastrous consequence. He had an innocent curiosity

For larger glimpses of that more than man
Which rolls the heavens, and lifts, and lays the deep,
Yet loves and hates with mortal hates and loves,
And moves unseen among the ways of men.

(ll. 20-23).

He says he wandered over different regions where he had a strange experience. He writes about it thus:

Then, in my wanderings all the lands that lie
Subjected to the Heliconian ridge
Have heard this footstep fall, although my wont
Was more to scale the highest of the heights
With some strange hope to see the nearer God.

(ll. 24-28).

The description reads like a metaphoric exposition of the poet's exploration of the Muses' domain and his own sojourn in it during his Somersby and Cambridge days when he had given himself up to the worship of art to the exclusion of all other concerns. The fact that he did this to forget
the privations and tensions at the Somersby home is imaged thus:

There once, but long ago, five-fold thy term
Of years, I lay; the winds were dead for heat;
The noonday crag made the land burn; and sick
For shadow - not one bush was near - I rose
Following a torrent till its myriad falls
Found silence in the hollows underneath.

(ll. 32-37)

The privations under the roof of a violent, ailing, and frustrated father was the metaphoric "heat" which made him "sick/ For shadow." His mind closes itself to the present and follows the "torrent" and "myriad falls" of his world of imagination, and finds "silence in the hollows underneath." What he gazes on there, symbolically, may be taken to be the kingdom of Art, the abode of the Muses, contemplating which it possibly dawns on him that if wisdom, reason, and purity are taken to be tenets of one's life, all its trials can be faced with courage and overcome with honour. The awareness sharpens his perception and arms him with an exceptional power of penetrating into the very nature of things. The attainment of this keen insight is symbolically represented as his chancing on the naked goddess Pallas Athene emerging after her bath from the pool. She is the deity of "wisdom, reason, purity." 64 It is she who

promised "self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control" to Paris as her "guerdon" which would push him "through a life of shocks, / Dangers, and deeds, until endurance grow/ Sinewed with action." ("Oenone," ll. 160-162). Angered at the trespass of young Tiresias, the goddess transfixed him with her cold and steady gaze till his eyes grew dark—
"Henceforth be blind, for thou hast seen too much/ And speak the truth that no man may believe." (ll. 48-49). The symbolic implication is obvious. Things not visible to others are clear and easily comprehendable to him. As soon as he envisions danger and disaster he warns the people, but the irony of his fate is that he is not heeded. This part of the first section appears to reflect his political opinions during his Cambridge days. These views are expressed in a number of his non-mythical poems of that period. Donahue writes that "Hail Briton!" a poem of early thirties, projects the poet's views on the political affairs of those days. Almost all his major concerns in "Hail Briton!" form the subject of Tiresias' anger in the passage that follows that of his blinding.

66. This leads to the probability of this part of the first section being composed between 1833-34.
As the poem moves towards the central section it deepens emotively. In "Hail Briton!" Tennyson recalls great men of courage who sacrificed their lives for the sake of freedom:

Who lit on times from which our own
Look diverse, when the court grew vast
And public rights were wholly cast
In shadow from the growing throne.

They gave their bodies to the death.

(11. 69-73).

In "Tiresias" the seer tells Menoeceus that the freedom of Thebes is threatened, and the fear of enslavement is overbearing:

Along the sounding walls. Above, below,
Shock after shock, the song-built towers and gates
Reel, bruised and butted with the shuddering
War-thunder of iron rams; and from within
The city comes a murmur void of joy,
Lest she be taken captive -- maidens, wives,
And mothers with their babblers of the dawn,
And oldest ago in shadow from the night,
Falling about their shrines before their Gods,
And wailing 'Save us.'
And they wail to thee!

(11. 95-104).

The opportunity of "nobly to do, nobly to die" has come to Menoeceus. The names of such men are
Graven on memorial columns, are a song
Heard in the future ...
... their examples reach a hand
Far through all years, and everywhere they meet
And kindle generous purpose, and the strength
To mould it into action pure as theirs.

(ll. 120-125).

A similar sentiment is expressed in "Hail Briton!"

Tennyson says:

They wrought a work which time reveres,
A precedent to all the lands,
And an example reaching hands
For ever into coming years.

(ll. 81-84).

Another poem of this period—"I Loving Freedom for Herself"—expresses the same thought:

Clean temple of the Memory,
Save thou for ever, carved in gold,
The name that such a patriot wears
Who dares be wise and bold,
To pluck us backwards from a time,
When only to be bold shall be
The whole of wisdom and the last
Resource of liberty.

(ll. 37-44).

These stanzas reflect the zeal of the Apostles.

Tennyson and Hallam had taken part in their Spanish adventure swayed by these ideals. "Tiresias" here reflects those ideals. The sage rues his blindness which prevents him from fighting for his country but he extols the virtue of
responding to the call of the country's need of the hour
with sacrifice. He urges Menoeceus to perform his duty.
The prince's assent is suggested in the lines: "This
useless hand! I felt one warm tear fall upon it, / Gone! /
He will achieve his greatness." (ll. 159-161). With the
utmost economy of words and restraint, the poet depicts
the highest of sacrifices which promise real immortality
to the mortals of this world. The poem ends on a note
of the seer's own frustration and disillusionment with
the times. This part of the poem, it may be said with
certainty, was written when the poet was an old man. 67
Hallam Tennyson quotes his father's words to describe the
frustrated poet's sadness: "I feel sometimes as if my
life had been a very useless life." 68 This feeling of
disillusionment, it could be said, brought back his old
urge to escape from such a world into the "past," but the
escape he visualizes now is a kind of poetic escape from
the present, into the world of his beloved and familiar
Elysian vales:

67. Footnote 61 ante, p. 126.
68. A Memoir, II, p. 337.
I would that I were gathered to my rest,
And mingled with the famous kings of old,
On whom about their ocean-islets flash
The faces of the Gods — the wise man’s word,
Here trampled by the populace underfoot,
There crowned with worship....

(l. 162-167).

He yearns to go to a region which is depicted in the following lines:

In height and prowess more than human, strive
Again for glory, while the golden lyre
Is ever sounding in heroic ears
Heroic hymns, and everyway the vales
Wind, clouded with grateful incense-fume
Of those who mix all odour to the Gods
On one far height in one far-shining fire.

(ll. 171-177).

The personal allegory sustains itself till the end. It is a sort of metaphoric autobiography of the poet’s soul, beginning from his childhood and coming down right up to his old age when the final version of this poem was written.

As a myth recast by Tennyson, it incorporates three myths, viz., Ares’ anger with Cadmus, Pallas Athene’s blinding of Tiresias, and Menoeceus’ sacrifice to save Thebes. Euripides’ Phoenissae is the source of the first and third myths, while Calimachus’ fifth Hymn provides the second one. 69 The myth of Ares’ anger with Cadmus provides the

69. The Poems of Tennyson, p. 568, and note 219, on p.569.
occasion of Menoeceus' sacrifice which is the theme of the poem.

As always, Tennyson's depiction is different from his source, Phoenissae or The Phoenician Women, in a number of ways. In Euripides' play Tiresias addresses Menoeceus as "Young Menoeceus, Creon's son." The dialogue that ensues, regarding the danger confronting Thebes, is between the sage and Creon, with Menoeceus within hearing distance. Tiresias does not reminisce about his loss of sight and attainment of prophetic powers. There is no indication in his statements to conclude that he is not believed. Creon is distraught with sorrow on hearing Tiresias' prophecy and would not have it known to the people of Thebes. At this, Tiresias, with subdued resentment, says: "A man's a fool to use the prophet's trade./ For if he happens to bring bitter news / He's hated by men for whom he works;/And if he pities them and tells lies/ He wrongs the gods."70 Euripides' Tiresias is initially reluctant to let Menoeceus know the prophecy. Creon, on learning it, would rather let the city be razed than sacrifice his own son: "I wasn't listening. I didn't hear,/ City,

70. Appendix III, Civ, p.286 . Capitalization in this and other quotations from this source (excerpt of translation of the Phoenissae from Greek into English, under the heading Appendix III, Civ), has been done for the sake of English syntactical consistency.
farewell." Euripides' Tiresias turns down Creon's request to remain silent. After the sage departs Creon asks his son to flee before the "chiefs and captains" come to know about it, while he himself leaves in haste to get gold to help his son to escape. Menoeceus then addresses the Chorus:

"This can be forgiven/ An ancient, but not pardoned in myself, / That I would so betray my father land./ Know well, I'm going, and I'll save the town,/ And give my life to death to save the land."  

It is significant that Tennyson changes the set up and modifies the myth, as depicted by Euripides, by making Tiresias address Menoeceus directly. He calls him "My son" as he extols the virtue of such a sacrifice. The address itself has marked undertones of the great "sacrifice of God and His Son," for Menoeceus is called upon to make the ultimate sacrifice for Thebes. E.D.H. Johnson overlooks Tiresias' address as being that of an ancient sage to a youth, with an underlying Christian message in it, when he says, "To his son Tiresias confesses that the vision still survives...."  


72. Ibid., p.291.

73. The Poems of Tennyson, p. 569.

mean Tiresias' son Johnson takes it too literally. Since the curse is on Cadmus' family, treating Menoeceus as Tiresias' and not Cadmus' son is a misreading by the critic that deprives the poem of a significant statement of the poet on paganism and Christianity. In "Demeter and Persephone" Dahl points out that underlying the last verse passage, where Demeter blesses the fields and renews the cycle of life and death, there are undertones of the message of "Christian hope." Tiresias could be said to impart a message of Christian sacrifice as exemplified by God's own Son. In handling the myth Tennyson enriches it by adding a new dimension to it. The pagan tale takes on a Christian hue. In the lines, "... and from within/ The city comes a murmur void of joy, / Lest she be taken captive - maidens, wives, / And mothers with their babblers of the dawn,/ And oldest age in shadow from the night,/ Falling about their shrines before their Gods,/ And wailing 'Save us'. / And they wail to thee!" (11. 98-104), the poet skilfully changes the whole perspective by shifting the focus from "their Gods" directly on to Menoeceus with "And they wail to thee." Their gods can do nothing while he, addressed by Tiresias throughout as "My son," becomes the metaphoric persona of Christ, the Son of God. But the expression, "My son,"

recalls another image, in the same poem, of the son of another god—Arês. It is that of the dragon beside the spring of Dirce whom Cadmus "brought" for the sake of the people. Their "trembling fathers" called it "The God's own son." It was for this crime that Arês war angry with the progeny of Cadmus. Young men, one, who had not yet known "the embrace of love," was to stone it the Christian way to pacify the god and save Thebes. The contrast between the selfish, self-centred god and the beneficient, kind, God comes out clearly in the use of the epithet "God's own son" for both the dragon and for Christ. The dragon of Dirce is reminiscent of another similar figure—the Kraken (in a poem with that title)—which possibly is a symbolic vision of Satan. 76 Recalling the forecast of the destruction

76. It is well known that Satan himself took the form of a serpent to achieve his vile designs, as the arch foe of God's Son, on God's earth. Milton describes Lucifer's search for a guise in which he might enter the precincts of the Earth which was still in its vernal purity:

thus the Orb he roamed
With narrow search; and with inspection deep
Considered every Creature, which of all
Most opportune might serve his Wiles, and found
The Serpent subtlest Beast of all the Field.

Paradise Lost Bk.IX, 11.82-86, p.184.

Satan is punished by God for seducing Man. Since he did it in the guise of a serpent, God makes him a serpent for ever:
of world by fire in the "Revelation" in the Bible, the poet writes in "The Kraken":

His Armes clung to his Ribs, his Legs entwining
Each other, till supplanted down he fell
A monstrous Serpent on his Belly prone....


His followers also became serpents but "...still greatest hee the midst, / Now Dragon grown...."

Paden writes:

"...it is possible to note that, according to Faber, the ancient mythologies used the serpent as a symbol of the evil principle and that 'it was thence employed to represent the deluge', usually in the form of a sea-snake. Thus were created figures of Python, Typhon, and the Midgard serpent.... The notion leads up to Tennyson's verses on 'The Kraken' (1830), which lies sleeping on the sea-floor until 'The latter fire shall heat the deep'."

(Tennyson in Egypt, note 204, p. 155).

Satan stands for the evil principle and so do the other serpents in mythologies.
There but he lain for ages and will lie
Battening upon huge seaworms in his sleep,
Until the latter fire shall heat the deep;
Then once by man and angels to be seen,
In roaring he shall rise and on the surface die.

(11. 11-15).

"The Kraken" can then be treated as Tennyson's symbolic vision of Satan. The dragon of Dirce, too, lurked in Dirce and is the son of god Arēs. All the pagan deities can, indirectly, be arrayed on the side of Satan and set against and contrasted with the Christian faith through the re-enactment of the supreme act of sacrifice of the Son of God, Christ, by Menoeceus. It can be conjectured that the pagan gods are Satanic (by being of the same set as Arēs, father of the dragon of Dirce who is akin to Satan), in their indifference to or their nefarious designs on poor humans. The Christian "Son of God," re-enacting Himself through Menoeceus' sacrifice, makes "Tiresias" a poem of Christian hope and faith.

It is in the theme of Menoeceus' sacrifice that

77. Douglas Bush in Pagan Myth and Christian Tradition in English Poetry (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1968), gives the tradition of conjoining pagan myths with the Christian cult in a number of ways, such as "pagan myths were garbled versions of Biblical truth" and that the "wars of the Giants and Titans against the gods suggested the revolt of Satan and his fellows against God and their imprisonment in hell." (p.4).
"Tiresias" can be regarded as a complement to "Ulysses" and "Tithonus." According to Ricks: "Faced with Hallam's death, Tennyson in 'Tiresias' seeks strength and consolation in the deliberate self-sacrifice that redeems death." He says that the poem tries to envisage circumstances in which "suicide was not merely condonable but honourable." This was an urge "with its roots in Dr. Tennyson's misery, Tennyson's early misery, and now the death of Hallam...." The story of the ancient curse which can be removed only "if one of these/ By his own hand" can take his own life makes Menoeceus accept this challenge.

"Tiresias" can be said to have a double purpose. In keeping with the general pattern of Tennyson's mythical poems it attempts to fill up a small breach in the structure of Greek mythology. The poet taken up the mysterious blind prophet, with strange powers of divining, at a critical juncture of his life and reveals him as a man by depicting the state of mind and despair of this father figure. To this patriarch he ascriber the episode embodying the virtues of self-sacrifice for a noble cause. This could also be taken as a modern frame for this poem, with the poet himself as Tiresias.

When compared with "Ulysses" and "Tithonus," it is

evident that the poem lacks their strong emotive power. This is because the poet's identity is merged with that of the protagonist in "Ulysses" and "Tithonus" and there is just one mood that is built up. In "Ulysses" it could be summed up as a purposeful quest for the knowledge of good and evil, with courage and an indomitable will. In "Tithonus" it is a rejection of purposeless existence. In "Tiresias" the identity of the narrator is merged with that of the prophet but the theme of self-sacrifice is realized through Menoeceus who is but a silent auditor. His presence is felt through Tiresias' repeated address to him as "My son," or when Tiresias feels Menoeceus' tear on his hand and indicates his abrupt departure with the exclamation - "Gone!/ He will achieve his greatness." (ll. 160-161). Besides, the narration is somewhat diversified as the poet brings in the background of Tiresias' blinding, and concentrates on the plight of the prophet at length. The poet is taken up much more with his own bleak world view. This detracts attention from the theme of sacrifice and thereby dilutes its impact.

The elegiac poems of "In Memoriam" are "short swallow flights that dip their wings in tears, and skim away." These three mythical poems ("Ulysses", "Tithonus", "
and "Tiresias"), born of the same sorrow that inspired "In Memoriam," delve into the problem of life and death and try to resolve it. There is a difference in the approach, depth, and vision of the poems of this set and other verses inspired by Hallam's death. Though all such poems are deeply subjective, "In Memoriam" from amongst them takes up the question of faith and doubt that assails the poet. The resolution is in the form of a re-establishment of faith. The multifaceted poem-like Greek myth poems can be said to stand apart as a class by themselves. They can be treated as the poet's "objective correlative[s]" for braving the struggle of life.79 These poems, like a prism, reflect the multiple concerns of the poet. They are a statement of the position of the artist. They are an assertion of life over death. The conclusion he reaches after a prolonged inner struggle of "to be or not to be" is recorded in them. They are interlinked thematically, and the themes they embody are multidimensional. As the poet's statement on art, they auger the awakening of his aesthetic conscience which shatters the hold of art-for-art's sake on him. To repeat what we have mentioned earlier in "Ulysses" and "Tiresias"—this world of art is expressed through the

symbol of a lush green landscape of mountains, streams, and dales, inhabited by nymphs and gods. In "Tithonus" it is symbolized by the East—a region of love, pleasure, and social interaction. By a note of instruction Tennyson makes these poems harbingers of the Christian message of faith and love for the sustenance of life. But what in life? The keynote of the answer is struck in the very first poem of this set with "Ulysses": "How dull it is to pause, to make an end,/ To rust unburnished, not to shine in use!/ As though to breathe were life." (ll. 22-24). The hero of "Locksley Hall," too, on realizing the futility of his misery, says: "I myself must mix with action, lest I wither by despair." (line 98). "To mix with action," to rescue life from living death, could be said to be the refrain of these poems. Their heroes are made to project, from various angles, action which saves life from being reduced to mere existence. This would be a sheer waste of the privilege of having a human form, the best Nature has yet been able to evolve. In "The Two Voices" the poet says:

I said, 'When first the world began,
Young Nature through five cycles ran,
And in the sixth she moulded man.

'She gave him mind, the lordliest
Proportion, and, above the rest,
Dominion in the head and breast.'

(ll. 16-21).
Man is at the moment on the highest rung of the ladder of evolution. It does not behove him to scale down the value of life to the level of brutes. Resigning oneself to grief and inaction would be akin to doing so. The concept of life and death of these three Greek heroes is different from that of the clinical concept. It is this which perhaps drew Tennyson towards them in his hour of crisis. These Greek heroes provided him with a plank from which to dive into life and seek its essence. Buckley seems to have seized the poet's inner conflict as reflected in these poems. He says that in his "less elegiac verses" he had begun to contemplate over "the counter claims of dying and living, denial and assent." 80

Tennyson did not adhere to the view that the protagonist had always to attain heroic stature. 81 Ulysses, Tithonus, Tiresias, are all old men, long past their prime of youth. Ulysses does display heroic qualities in his resolute will to forge ahead, but Tithonus and Tiresias are victims of their circumstances and, inspite of their ideals of life, do not seem to rise to heroic heights. Their approach to life is, however, the same. "Ulysses" is

80. J.H. Buckley, Tennyson the Growth of a Poet, p. 60.

supposed to be a poem of exemplary courage and will power of an old man, a poem of life and action. But so are "Tithonus" and "Tiresias," though from a different angle. Tithonus begs for death because he has already lost what he considers life. He calls himself "this gray shadow, once a man" and "A white-haired shadow roaming like a dream."

The juxtaposition of the contrast between him and Eos makes his plight come out with greater intensity. "Immortal age beside immortal youth." The contiguity seems to heighten the loss of vigour, youth, and beauty of Tithonus. Instead of continuing to live a crippled life "marred," "wasted," and "maimed," he seeks to be released from the burden of immortality. His is not a rejection of life but the rejection of a particular state of life. This is not life but a living death. It recalls Ulysses' sarcastic comment, "as though to breathe were life." By implication then, "Tithonus" can be taken to be a plea for active life, a tacit statement of the poet's concept of life.

Tiresias is handicapped by both blindness and age. Though not yet reduced to the state of decrepitude of Tithonus, he has severe limitations. Thebes is endangered, others will defend it while he will have to endure his own helplessness. Monoeccous will live even in death while
Tiresias is doomed to oblivion. "He will achieve his greatness," says the sage, "But for me, I would that I were gathered to my rest." (ll. 161-162).

By rejecting insipid, inactive lives, which vary only in degree, Tithonus and Tiresias uphold the life of Ulysses—active, purposeful, even in old age, the life of Menoeceus that embraces death in its prime of youth. The juxtaposition is of an active purposeful life with that of a helpless vegetative existence. In "The Lotus-Eaters" the protest is against toil and action: "All things have rest: Why should we toil alone, / We only toil, who are the first of things, / And make perpetual morn." (ll. 60-62). But in this trilogy he makes amends by making toil the prime condition of life. The concept of life here is value based. Nothing, not even grief, should let life be wasted in sloth. He makes out a case for the salutary contribution of death in enhancing the value of life. He reinterprets the meaning of life which cuts across the barriers of death and makes it seem less formidable. As protagonists of these poems, these heroes are men of action, and when unable to live up to their ideals of life, they prefer death.

This set indeed occupies a central place among the mythical poems of Tennyson. Its poems "half reveal and
half conceal" the tension and conflict in the mind of the poet which impelled him to recast the myths. With great dexterity he exploits their inherent plasticity to serve his own purpose and makes them reflect his moods and creed. It may be said that he is at his best in treating themes of a by-gone age. He is, in them, a true poet.