'The Exile's Harp'
Tennyson's Lost World of Music

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From the earliest reviews, the trope of music has shaped the image of Tennyson for critics and readers. Tennyson's talent is one that joins voice and ear:

> Nature […] has taught Mr. Tennyson to sing as a poet should sing, – she has taught him to throw his whole soul into his harmonies.[1]

> He has a fine ear for melody and harmony too – and rare and rich glimpses of imagination. He has – *genius*.[2]

Music as a master concept combines the natural spontaneity of song with the receptive vibrations of a lyrical sensibility ('a spirit "finely touched" and "touched to fine issues"'),[3] and with the ennobling reflections of speculative rigour ('the rich metaphysical melodies of Tennyson').[4] The remarks by W.J. Fox in the *Monthly Repository* in 1833 epitomize what had come to be at stake in the notion of Tennyson's musical gifts. Fox mingles a description of Tennyson's actual achievement with a normative projection of where his 'qualities' should lead, if fulfilled:

> The true poet is compounded of the philosopher and the *artiste*. His nervous organisation should have internally the tenacity which will weave into the firmest web of solid thought, and in his sense, externally, be tremulous as the strings of the Aeolian harp, that quiver in every breeze, but ever tremble tunefully. The author has a large endowment of both these qualities, yielding, perhaps, among poets of modern fame, only to Wordsworth in the one, and Coleridge in the other; and affording, by their combination, a promise which the world requires and needs of him.[5]

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1 From a review of *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical*, in *New Monthly Magazine*, xxx (Mar. 1831): 111–12.

2 Christopher North (John Wilson), 'Noctes Amrosianae', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (Feb. 1832). Cited by Edgar Finley Shannon, *Tennyson and the Reviewers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1952): 7.

3 'a poet of fancy, feeling, and imagination; gifted with a deep sense of the beautiful', from review of *Poems*, *Athenaeum* (1 Dec. 1832): 772.

4 W. J. Fox, Review of James White's *The Village Poor-House*. Cited by Shannon, *Tennyson and the Reviewers*: 9.

5 W. J. Fox, Review of *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical* and *Poems* (Jan. 1833). Cited by Shannon, *Tennyson and the Reviewers*: 17–18.

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The 'true poet' is a confidant of nature and the muses. He is an artist of tune, but must demonstrate (and here is the lesson) the tenacity to weave sound with philosophy, so that he can become prophet and sage, one who meets through his art that 'promise which the world requires and needs of him'.

Edgar Shannon's study of Tennyson's critical reception suggests how far and how soon this compound image of the poet – piping tunesmith and trumpeting manly sage, as it were – came in turn to determine the poet's self-image. Indeed, much of Tennyson's career, with its endless revisions and large-scale projects, can be read as an attempt to integrate the diverse imperatives of society and self entailed in such comments. We might suspect that this was as disabling as it was inspiring, that remarks like Fox's (and there were many of them) conveyed less a feasible agenda for a poet than the burden of an impossible cultural fantasy. But that it was a burden that Tennyson took on can be seen in his determination to move, as Shannon put it, 'from the fanciful and the pretty to ideas and themes more concerned with the interests of the day and closer to the hearts of men'.[6] As the *Athenaeum* critic put it, Tennyson needed to demonstrate more of 'the manly courage, the cheerful faith and hope' appropriate to a poet of the age properly engaged with the contemporary world.[7] At the same time, Shannon shows how Tennyson was endlessly responsive to the other main suggestion of his critics – that he needed to refine, at the opposite micro-level, his mastery of sound, diction, sense and tone, and this too was a life-long project.[8]

Certainly, it is not credible that the musical cliché would have taken hold if it had not contained specific applications and truths, if sound had not been an important condition of Tennyson's art, a kernel in which the magic was enclosed, and through which it could be unlocked and released. Christopher Ricks has given a brilliant description of how the virtuosity of phrasing, and the variations of inflection and intonation, conspire in the recording of 'The Charge of the Light Brigade' to exert their 'riveting' effect 'with an emphasis at once awed, exasperated, and half-incredulous' at the 'immediately culpable folly of "Some one"' in the line 'Some one had blundered'.[9] This was the line, of course, whose presence in the *Times* report inspired the poet, acting as a sonic and rhythmic grain that over time brought forth the pearl of the poem in all its indignation and glory:

> *The Times* account had 'Someone had blundered', and the line kept running in my head, and I kept saying it over and over till it shaped itself into the burden of the poem.[10]

However, Tennyson did not invite or appreciate musical settings of his work.[11] Notwithstanding the durability of Richard Strauss's piano accompaniment to

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6 Shannon, *Tennyson and the Reviewers*: 46.

7 *Athenaeum* (6 Apr. 1844): 318. Many of these reviewers clearly anticipate themes in Isobel Armstrong's influential conception of Tennyson's revisions too, in citing how Tennyson's sought to overcome what were perceived as his languorous tendencies to song, introspection and 'memories of the past', and his need to show how poetry might engage with the world, and 'social injustice' in a phrase from a review in *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal*, cited by Shannon, *Tennyson and the Reviewers*: 88.

8 See Shannon, *Tennyson and the Reviewers*: 39–59.

9 Christopher Ricks, *Tennyson* (London: Palgrave, 1989): 231.

10 W. F. Rawnsley, 'Personal Recollections of Tennyson', in Norman Page, ed., *Tennyson: Interviews and Recollections* (London: Macmillan, 1983): 24.

11 Peter Levi's briskly dismissive remarks reflect what seems a prevalent lack of enthusiasm: 'I have not attempted to trace all the musical settings of his verse: I know the

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Enoch Arden, or Benjamin Britten's setting of 'The Kraken', there is a consensus that the inherent musicality of Tennyson's language in fact puts it at odds with the music it inspires.[12] As James Knowles put it:

> I hardly ever knew him to care greatly for any 'setting' of his own songs, which he justly felt had already their own music that was confused by the 'setting'. It is curious that Browning, whose music is so rare in his verse, was a masterly musician outside of it, while Tennyson, whose every line was music, cared so little for it, except in poetry.[13]

Knowles's remarks dovetail with Tennyson's own perceptions:

> Tennyson was fond of saying that he had no training in music and no real appreciation of it, whereas Browning knew a great deal about it and loved it, but that ironically Browning's poetry had no music while his own overflowed with it.[14]

A further aspect of what Charles Villiers Stanford calls the 'inborn' quality of the music in the poetry emerges in the intimate connections between the verse, and

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few that are famous, and have heard some of Lear's, though they do not encourage one to probe any further. Hallam Tennyson's friend Stanford is an improvement, but I have never heard for example the lute music Elgar wrote for Tennyson's play *Queen Mary*' (Peter Levi, *Tennyson* (London: Macmillan, 1993): 6). Tennyson himself too, in Robert Martin's phrase, 'hated having his poems set to music' (Robert Martin, *Tennyson: The Unquiet Heart* (London: Oxford University Press, 1980): 397) as is well known, and the waltz arrangement of 'Come into the Garden, Maud' is probably the most notorious case. Again, he was embarrassed by the song-cycle, *The Window* or *The Song of the Wrens*, on which he had collaborated. Interestingly enough, Leonee Ormond points out that Beethoven's song-cycle, *An die ferne Geliebte*, was one inspiration for *The Window* (see her *Alfred Tennyson: A Literary Life* (London: Macmillan, 1993): 172). In Levi's words, 'he writhed and wriggled over some pretty but alas silly light verses he had written being set to music by Sullivan, and then made public' (Levi, *Tennyson*: 259).

12 Many have commented that the tender modulations and *legato* effects of sound in Tennyson's lines make actual music redundant or superfluous, the poetry remaining sealed within its own circumscribed, quasi-musical realm. Charles Villiers Stanford made similar points from a musician's viewpoint: 'The secret of the harmony of his verse lay in his incomparable ear for the juxtaposition of vowels and the exact suitability of each consonant. This makes it difficult to set his poems adequately to music. The music is so inborn in the poetry itself that it does not ask for notes to make incompleteness complete, and music is set to it rather for additional illustration rather than from inherent necessity' (Charles Villiers Stanford, 'A Composer Remembers', in Page, ed., *Tennyson*: *Interviews and Recollections*: 129). Ironically perhaps, Stanford was one of the few musicians whom Tennyson actually asked to write accompanying music for his work, for *Queen Mary* in 1876. Tellingly, though, Stanford was a friend of Hallam Tennyson, and it is a similar principle of personal association, rather than musical pleasure in itself, that seemed to have led to Tennyson's sanctioning of the settings by his wife, Emily, and Edward Lear. Martin writes of Lear's visit to Farringford in October 1855, when he would sing 'in his high untrained voice his own settings of "Mariana", "The Lotos-Eaters", and "Oh! that 'twere possible" with an intensity that made his lack of technique unimportant and made even Tennyson approve of the songs' (Martin, *Tennyson*: 397). Also, at his funeral, in Leonee Ormond's words, 'Emily was not present, but the choir sang her setting of "Silent Voices"' (Leonee Ormond, *Alfred Tennyson*: 199).

13 James Knowles, 'A Personal Reminiscence', in Page, ed., *Tennyson: Interviews and Recollections*: 90

14 Martin, *Tennyson: The Unquiet Heart*: 394.

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Tennyson's methods of composition and passion for recitation.[15] Knowles describes how 'with his pipe in his mouth and over his fire he would weave into music what things "came to him"; for he never accounted for his poetry in any other way than that it came'.[16] And once they had come, these musical weavings would remain, the words resonating and resounding within his inner mind, like Merlin's 'dark forethought' that:

> rolled about his brain
> As on a dull day in an Ocean cave
> The blind wave feeling round his long sea-hall
> In silence.[17]

In his readings, too, timbre and intonation would envelop and convey meaning, while also absorbing the entranced reader into the involutions of the Tennysonian imagination. Edward Fitzgerald referred to the 'magic' and 'deep-chested music' of his recitals that so captivated his audience.[18] On hearing the laureate read 'Maud', Thomas Carlyle wrote to Ralph Waldo Emerson that 'His voice is musical metallic',[19] while Elizabeth Barrett-Browning commented on his sonorous voice, 'like an organ'.[20] One could multiply such remarks.[21]

And yet, for all the musicality of his language and his recitations, musical pleasure, I've suggested, was in significant respects lost to Tennyson. Recalling days in the 'wooded seclusion' of Farringford, Blanche Warre-Cornish reported Tennyson's opinion that 'music was a subject to which [he] gave his attention, with regret that he was by nature shut out from it'.[22] Did he mean that it was something in Nature herself, or something in his own nature that resulted in music being closed to him? In any case, the same wistfulness can be heard again in

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15 Knowles, 'A Personal Reminiscence', in Page, ed., *Tennyson: Interviews and Recollections*: 90.

16 Ibid., 90.

17 Lines 228–31, Alfred Tennyson, *The Poems of Tennyson*, ed. Christopher Ricks (London: Longman, 1969): 1602. Hereafter, citations of quotations from this edition will be found in the text in the format (line no(s)./page no(s).

18 Cited in Page, ed., *Tennyson: Interviews and Recollections*: ix.

19 Thomas Carlyle, 'A Bit of Chaos', in Page, ed., *Tennyson: Interviews and Recollections*: 16.

20 Cited by Martin, *Tennyson: The Unquiet Heart*: 393.

21 In a similar vein, Palgrave described the distinctive range, and 'great *sostenuo* power' of Tennyson's 'voice and delivery', and 'the *portamento* so justly dear to Italian vocalists […] the ample resonant utterance' (cited by Page, ed., *Tennyson: Interviews and Recollections*: ix). Lincolnshire friend, W. F. Rawnsley, wrote that the 'sound of a line of poetry (for poetry to be fully understood, should be read aloud) was very much to him; and he certainly was unmatched in his use of vowels and in the melody of his verse' (in 'Personal Recollections of Tennyson', Page, ed., *Tennyson: Interviews and Recollections*: 21). James Knowles refers to Tennyson's reading as like 'musical thunder' ('A Personal Reminiscence', in Page, ed., *Tennyson: Interviews and Recollections*: 93). As for the recitations themselves, there are numerous anecdotes that indicate their singularity, their gravity, power and flashes of levity, and how crucial metre and phrasing were to the full effect. Leonee Ormond, for example, summatively notes how the adoption of quantitative metre accentuated the 'sing-song' nature of these recitations, so that the words would be stressed 'in terms of time, like music, rather than numerically, by beat' (Leonee Ormond, *Alfred Tennyson*: 155).

22 Blanche Warre-Cornish, 'Memories of Tennyson', first published in the *London Mercury*, 1921–22, and reprinted in Page, ed., *Tennyson: Interviews and Recollections*: 114.

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Warre-Cornish's memoir. After listening to her sister play the 'Waldstein', Tennyson remarks on his own incapacity:

> I can feel the glory, though I can't follow the music. I know that I miss a great deal by not understanding it. It often seems to me that music must take up expression at the point where poetry leaves off, and expresses what can't be expressed in words.[23]

This brings us to the intriguing paradox whereby the musical attributes of his verse co-exist with the representation of a world where musical pleasure and expression are essentially denied. True, music as a topic is endlessly invoked, as we shall see, in the scenarios of his verse, but in identification with unattainable joys – with glimmerings, for instance, from the lost world of the past, or the undiscovered world to come. My central concern in what follows is to use the topic of music to probe such aspects of Tennyson's affective world, and in particular the ways his work is preoccupied with solipsistic states of displacement and grief. Indeed, the generative tension in much of his poetry, one can crudely say, derives from the underlying, mysterious sense of regret, in being shut out from pleasure, debarred, *a priori* as it were, from happiness.

Within this context, my discussion focuses on two main areas: firstly, it shows the (largely unrecognized) extent to which Tennyson relies on musical *topoi*, motifs and scenes to stage and dramatize this abiding sense of the impoverished expressive possibilities of the world. Secondly, and more importantly, it addresses the question: What is the affective core of the utterly intractable sense here, of what one could broadly call exile in Tennyson? To put it another way, what was it that Tennyson felt he had lost for always (even in principle as it were), or could never find, but which still tormented or tantalized him on musical occasions? Further, what was it that set Tennyson apart in these respects from so many other Romantic and nineteenth-century poets who used music as an affective marker, a means of engagement, with what exists outside the interiority of the speaker? If it is true that Tennyson responded to the critics' enjoining him to a proper preoccupation with the contemporary world, it is equally true that this seems a millstone, a fate, at best a duty. The lyrical mainsprings of Tennyson's sensibility are not naturally forced by what is outside him, but emerge in more inward, private, fatalistic ways from within. The essential musical paradigm for Tennyson, one could say, would not be the surprising, uplifting, broadcast song of a skylark or the thrush, but the expressive, mournful, inward valediction of the swan.

At this point, it is best to introduce in broad terms the conclusion that underlies what follows. The discussion ranges over diverse aspects, phases and elements of Tennyson's art, and seeks to give due measure to his religious and political attitudes. At the same time, the discussion homes in on a more abiding and fundamental nostalgia for the feminine within Tennyson's work, and so sees this

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23 Warre-Cornish, 'Memories of Tennyson': 114. One could give many other examples of Tennyson's indifference to music. Warre-Cornish goes on to relate Tennyson's remarks after hearing Joachim (who would often play for the Tennysons) that 'A great deal of music means nothing to me, but I can feel the poetry of the bowing' (ibid., 114). In fact, Tennyson's family were musical. Frederick was an accomplished musician, while his father and sister played the harp, and Charles several instruments. This milieu affected Alfred to the degree that he seems to have played the flute in early life, but there is little apparently recorded of this in later life (Peter Levi, *Tennyson*: 21).

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as underlying the mournful and static representations of masculine subjectivity within it. Music is useful here, because it is seen as perpetually linked with femininity in Tennyson's imagination. So, it is towards this conclusion that the various paths of the discussion converge. In the first place, the article seeks to show how Tennyson's poems are endlessly punctuated by music, in its connections with the lost symbiosis of maternal love and the tantalizing visitations of romance. At the same time, the argument goes, Tennyson's uses of music reveal also a conflicting identification *with* women, even *as* a woman. (Though the argument is only suggested here, it is believed that much of the trajectory of Tennyson's career as a poet can be seen as an attempt to find forms of masculinity that could overlay, displace or redeem this affective predisposition.) Put most crudely, then, Tennyson's art is seen as one that associates music with the contrary wishes that circulate in a recursive fashion throughout his work – to lose oneself with a woman, to lose oneself by becoming one. As a corollary of these things, I argue that the entwined senses of rejection by, and/or exclusion from, the female world breeds the peculiarly complex and mysterious aura of blighted masculinity within Tennyson's work. Finally, in pursuing these points, the essay clearly intervenes in a debate about the feminine aspects of Tennyson's sensibility that has a long, though rather inconclusive, history. It also connects with recent work that has argued for the cultural equation of musicality and femininity within Victorian Britain.[24]

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[24] The *Athenaeum* reviewer who referred, on 6 April 1844, to the lack in Tennyson of 'the manly courage, the cheerful faith and hope' was rehearsing an already well-worn position about the parlous masculinity, and the feminine tendencies, of the poet's work. These were recurrent strains in the earliest reviews, most notoriously in the journalism of Edward Bulwer ('The Faults of Recent Poets', *New Monthly Magazine*, 37 (Jan. 1833): 69–74), John Wilson or 'Christopher North' (Review of *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical*, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 31 (May 1832): 721–41), and J. W. Croker (Review of *Poems* in the *Quarterly Review* (April 1833). These articles are reprinted in *Tennyson: The Critical Heritage*, ed. John Jump: 66–83. These topics continued to attract comment amongst celebrated Victorians such as Manley Hopkins (Review of *Poems, 1842* and *The Princess*, *The Times* (12 Oct. 1848): 3), and Charles Kingsley (Review of *Poems, 1842* and *The Princess*, in *Fraser's Magazine*, 42 [Sep. 1850]: 245–55).

More recently, of course, these issues have attracted a widening range of critical discussions, from the Jungian reading of Lionel Stevenson ('The "High-Born Maiden" Symbol in Tennyson', in *Critical Essays on the Poetry of Tennyson*, ed. John Killham (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960): 126–36) to the notable feminist readings of Kate Millett (*Sexual Politics*, London: Abacus, 1971), Carol Christ ('Victorian Masculinity and the Angel in the House', in Martha Vincinus, ed. *The Widening Sphere* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1977): 146–62), and 'The Feminine Subject in Victorian Poetry', *English Literary History* 54/2 (1987): 385–401), and Marjorie Stone ('Genre Subversion and Gender Inversion: *The Princess* and *Aurora Leigh*', *Victorian Poetry*, 25/2 (1987): 101–27. Issues of homosexuality and cross-gender identification have also been variously interrogated or sounded by Christopher Ricks (*Tennyson* (London: Palgrave, 1989)), Alan Sinfield (*Alfred Tennyson* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986)), and Christopher Craft ('"Descend and Touch and Enter": Tennyson's Strange Manner of Address', *Genders*, 1 (spring 1988): 83–101). Finally, Richard Cronin (*Romantic Victorians: English Literature, 1824–1840*, London: Palgrave (2002)) has speculated on the relation between the female *personae* of Tennyson's earliest work and the feminized poetics that characterized the literary culture of the 1830s. This was a point made famously by Alfred Austin in 1869, and discussed by Christ in 'The Feminine Subject in Victorian Poetry': 386.

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'The Exile's Harp' (published in 1827 and not reprinted in Tennyson's lifetime) literally begins where music leaves off. The speaker – like many such Byronic figures in Tennyson's earliest work – takes his leave of the ancestral home, his sense of displacement and isolation staged as a turning away from the now impossible, perhaps even prohibited, pleasures of music. The poem begins with a motif from the Psalms:[25]

> I will hang thee, my Harp, by the side of the fountain,
> On the whispering branch of the lone-waving willow (1–2/85)

As he prepares to leave, the speaker anticipates only a deepening predicament of exclusion, and imagines in his mind's ear 'the wild gales' that 'alone shall arouse thy sad strain'. He seeks a measure of solace – on the far side of a rending loss – in the idea that he might be thought of as one who has made a heroic and voluntary accommodation to grief. Thus, he decides to wreathe the harp in flowers to commemorate his departure, so that they may 'bloom for one day when thy minstrel has fled!' and bring him, as they wither, into the memory of those who pass. He imagines himself as at best a fleeting sympathetic thought in their minds, as in the reader's mind too, which echoes for an instant – like the elements of the landscape – with the passing sense of the exile's loss and sorrow. The final chorus ends with the minstrel about to give the harp one final, noble, flourish as he bids farewell:

> One sweep will I give thee
> And wake thy bold swell;
> Then, thou friend of my bosom,
> For ever farewell! (29–32/85)

This stricken and self-ennobling gesture, as he moves from a lost world of love to embrace his tragic fate and exile, clearly anticipates the affective drama of countless early Tennyson poems. Typically too, as it ends the poem enacts what it dramatizes, its own final 'bold swell' demonstrating Tennyson's oft-noted genius in 'suiting sound to sense' in George Saintsbury's words.[26] In particular, the final

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At this point it is worth acknowledging too, the new impetus that has been given to these discussions by the work of critics such as Phyllis Weliver (*Woman Musicians in Victorian Fiction* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000)) and Phyllis Gillett (*Musical Women in England, 1879–1914* (London: Macmillan, 2000)). These critics have studied the sharp divisions and inflections of gender that marked music-making and musical expression in Victorian society, and have in different ways identified these as being, in important ways, predominantly female pursuits.

[25] Ironically enough, an anonymous essayist, bewailing the absence of contemporaneous poets, wrote in 1826, 'We have lived in an age of poetry, probably survived it. Of the men, some indeed remain, but the poets, where are they? Some are dead and some are gone into captivity, – "they have hanged their harps upon the willows"'. 'An Essay on the Poetic Character of Percy Bysshe Shelley, and on the Probable Tendency of His Writings', *Metropolitan Quarterly Review*, 2 (1826): 191.

[26] George Saintsbury, *A History of English Prosody*, vol. III (London: Macmillan, 1923): 192. Compare here too Arthur Henry Hallam's description of Tennyson's capacity to match 'lyrical measures and exquisite modulation of harmonious words and cadences to the swell

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word 'farewell' gathers together the insistent effects of sound of the closing lines, so that an emphatic cadence appropriately underscores the moment of leave-taking. Effects of rhyme and alliteration multiply and intensify ('sweep'/'swell'; 'thee'/'thy'/'Then'/'thou'), congregating on 'farewell' which provides the final rhyme, as well as revisiting, for one last time, the local alliterative 'r' and 'f' sounds in 'friend/For ever'. Prosodically too, the word acts as an ultimate moment of rhythmical boldness. It is a strident spondee that counterposes the rather unpredictable rhythmical wanderings of the lines, and that ensures that the three beats in the second line find a firm echo. However, this revisiting is also a departure: the bravura double strum of 'farewell' hangs and reverberates in the air, the word anticipating both in meaning and as sound its own inevitable fading into nothingness. Lastly here, this gathering, consciously valedictory, insistence of sound at the close of the poem can be taken too as an example of what Yopie Prins describes as a form of intonational sublime in Tennyson's poetry, whereby 'the cadence of speech falls into measured units before it can be sublimated or uplifted into "voice"'[27] (particularly Tennyson's own voice). In this case, everything conspires to focus sound and meaning on the climactic word, 'farewell', which rings out as the determining speech act of the poem.

This musical farewell, of course, is highly suggestive of the aesthetic values of Tennyson's poetry, but also of its affective motives, as the speaker's solitude links to the sympathetic inwardness of the reader.[28] These are certainly strikingly prevalent motifs and features in the poems of the 1827 collection (and many other unpublished poems of the time), where music enters as a tormenting signal of lost, impossible pleasures, as in 'The Old Sword', 'Antony to Cleopatra', 'We meet no more', 'Written by an Exile of Bassorah', 'Remorse', and 'The Old Chieftain'. In 'Inverlee' (dated 1826 though unpublished) the poet imagines all the ageing inhabitants of the 'old hall' who are now far away in 'foreign hills'. Cursed by memory, they cannot forget the home they will never revisit:

> For aye recur the whitening towers
> Of the old hall at Inverlee,
> The merry, merry hall, whose bowers
> Rang loud to midnight minstrelsy; (33–6/161)

The speaker in 'I wander in darkness and sorrow' welcomes the wild and 'merciless' ravings of blasts, hurricanes, and tempests because:

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and fall of the feelings expressed' (Unsigned review, *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical* in *Englishman's Magazine* (Aug. 1831). Reprinted in Jump, ed., *Tennyson: The Critical Heritage*: 42).

27 Yopie Prins, 'Victorian Meters' in *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Poetry*, ed. Joseph Bristow (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000): 98.

28 Robert Douglas-Fairhurst's brilliant discussion of Tennysonian sympathy proceeds in ways that complement these emphases (*Victorian Afterlives: The Shaping of Influence in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002)). He explores the ways in which Tennyson's poems both do and don't end (as in 'The Exile's Harp' with its final word that nonetheless resounds). In dedicating themselves to 'incomplete achievement and achieved incompleteness' (Douglas-Fairhurst, *Victorian Afterlives*, 182), they express an interiority that returns upon itself (to paraphrase Hallam) in endless self-visiting and acts of revision, and whose echoic features create 'a set of echo-chambers for his readers to listen in on themselves' and wherein they find their own subjectivities reflected and sounded (and, as it were, *already* remembered) by the words of the poem (Douglas-Fairhurst, *Victorian Afterlives*, 217).

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> Not a friend that I loved but is dead,
> Not a hope but has faded away! (11–12/93)

This poem ends with his mind conjuring a forsaken family hall, like that of 'Inverlee' or 'The Exile's Harp', as a locus for the lost pleasures of society and music. Every kind of human communication and expression appears in this wasteland as given over to the inexorable encroachments of natural wildness and decay:

> Like the voice of the owl in the hall,
>   Where the song and the banquet have ceased,
> Where the green weeds have mantled the hearth,
>   Whence arose the proud flame of the feast;
> So I cry to the storm, whose dark wing
>   Scatters on me the wild-driving sleet –
> *'Let the roar of the wind be around me,*
>   *'The fall of the leaves at my feet!'* (41–8/93–4)

It takes little ingenuity to demonstrate that repeatedly through Tennyson's career, his central male figures find that intractable circumstance expels them from the happiness they appear to deserve, condemning them at best to the dubious and meagre (though increasingly valorized) gains of renunciation.[29] It is clearly a pattern that shapes the narrative of larger poems such as 'The Lover's Tale', 'Maud' or *Enoch Arden*, where the protagonist comes to haunt his own life. Tormented by dislocating facts that he can neither change nor bear to remember, each finds that his life is structured by and as repetition. These figures become estranged, ghostly visitants, and subject to their own phantoms and demons. The story of each man is of a turning away and a turning inwards, their connections with actuality and futurity dissolving as they are bound, like Merlin or Tithonus, within a intractable fate entailed by the ironies of their own impossible desires. These protagonists endure in a twilight zone, mourning their disconnection from use, interrogating the phantasmal imagery – of self, art, memory, loss, regret, desire – that they have substituted for the world, and embracing only the imminence of their own passing. They correlate in this respect to Tennyson's verbal music or magic as it turns words from everyday applications, constituting through its own internal rigours of repetition and sound a secondary, counter-world: an echo-chamber, Ocean cave, or palace of art.

As in the 1827 poems, though, what has been less remarked is how often the vanished time of hope and reciprocity in Tennyson's narratives of exclusion and loss is associated with music, as for Julian in 'The Lover's Tale', whose love for Camilla unfolded from their youth, when they 'learned/To lisp in tune together' (251–2/309). When his youthful passion reveals itself, it is similarly described as involving an expansive transport that 'sent his soul/Into the song of birds':

>   Never yet
> Before or after have I known the spring

[29] Exile, amid a threatening sense of personal disintegration, was a pattern that his early life particularly seemed to repeat, as in Robert Martin's description of his 'discontent and restlessness' from the early 1830s: 'For the next eighteen years, particularly after Hallam's death, he was to be almost homeless, wandering from friend to friend, settling briefly with his family, then pulling up stakes and going off unexpectedly.' (Robert Martin, *Tennyson: The Unquiet Heart*: 149.)

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> Pour with such sudden deluges of light
> Into the middle summer; for that day
> Love, rising, shook his wings, and charged the winds
> With spiced May-sweets from bound to bound, and blew
> Fresh fire into the sun, and from within
> Burst through the heated buds, and sent his soul
> Into the song of birds, and touched far-off
> His mountain-altars, his high hills, with flame
> Milder and purer. (307–17/312)

His feeling is one element in a widespread, transpersonal transmission of emotion. 'Love' transfigures and binds together the natural, human and spiritual worlds, overcoming the constraining logic of identity. His joy in togetherness finds expression 'in that hour/A hope flowed round me, like a golden mist/Charmed amid eddies of melodious airs' (439–40/316). Once again, music as a figure transcends separation, drawing the whole environment into an expressive rhapsody. In such ways, throughout Tennyson's career, love, as a figure of collective expression, possesses a redemptive power to dissolve the prison walls of the self, and to reconfigure temporarily the world as a mobile, symphony of becoming. However, the poem ends with Julian nobly renouncing his own love. Outside 'the charmed circle' of domesticity (374/348), having reconciled Camilla, husband and child, he passes 'for ever from his native land' (384/348). Enoch undergoes a similar estrangement in different circumstances when the reality of his island is borne in on him. This is all the more wrenching because it succeeds the momentary delusion that he is back in the earlier time when he and Annie were married and 'merrily rang the bells/Merrily rang the bells' (507–08/1142):

> Once likewise, in the ringing of his ears
> Though faintly, merrily – far and far away –
> He heard the pealing of his parish bells;
> Then, though he knew not wherefore, started up
> Shuddering, and when the beauteous hateful isle
> Returned upon him, had not his poor heart
> Spoken with That, which being everywhere
> Lets none, who speaks with Him, seem all alone,
> Surely the man had died of solitude. (609–617/1144–5)

This repeated structure of grief and abandoned hope is worth examining too as it functions in the celebrated or notorious endings of works like 'Maud', or 'Locksley Hall'. In the latter poem, the martial music of men ('my merry comrades … sounding on the bugle-horn' (145/697)) shames and steels the speaker into his defiant farewell to Locksley Hall, with its memories of the faithless Amy and the joys of the past time when:

> Love took up the harp of Life, and smote on all the chords with might;
> Smote the chord of Self, that, trembling, passed in music out of sight.
> (33–34/691)

The musical image suggests the transitoriness of the joys of the past, but also the earlier vulnerability and tremulous susceptibility of the speaker who had been passionately taken up and played upon by Love and Life, before this momentary self-expression 'passed in music out of sight'. The poem ends with the

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disappointment and belatedness of a very different situation, passion, and music, as the dutiful soldier volunteers the shell of himself to the larger cause. Like the speaker at the end of 'Maud', he strives to repress memory, to overcome the poem's abiding consciousness of 'the truth the poet sings,/That a sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering happier things'(76/693).

In 'Maud', similarly, the transient manifestations of love are associated with music. The speaker's initial resentment and bitterness is offset crucially by Maud's song that brings him to the point of tears:

> A voice by the cedar tree
> In the meadow under the Hall!
> She is singing an air that is known to me,
> A passionate ballad gallant and gay.
> A martial song like a trumpet's call! (162–5/1052)

His prophetic sense that she sings of a 'joy in which I cannot rejoice/A glory I cannot find' (182–3/1052) is confirmed by the calamitous, ironic universe of the poem, and the din of the fatal fight with her brother that occasions Maud's flight and death, and his own madness and ultimate dedication to fight in the Crimea. Against these catastrophes, the lyrical and often explicitly musical interludes affirm tormentingly unsustainable possibilities:

> And ye meanwhile far over moor and fell
> Beat to the noiseless music of the night! (674–5/1070)

As he lies awake watching the stars and listening to the waves, he intuits, against his sceptical misgivings, his beloved asleep in a universe harmonized and musicalized by the influences of love. As a more notable instance of this, one can describe here the protagonist's ardour, when, excluded from the music of the hall, he waits for Maud in the garden:

> All night have the roses heard
> The flute, violin, bassoon;
> All night has the casement jessamine stirred
> To the dancers dancing in tune;
> Till a silence fell with the waking bird
> And a hush with the setting moon. (862–7/1075–6)

His hopeful and open sense of himself at this moment is blended with the evening's weavings together of different bodies and senses, in ways resistant to logic and custom. The verse becomes an enhanced medium of natural beauty, in which the cognitive and bodily distinctions between speaker and the roses and jessamine – like the sensory distinctions between colour, sound and sight – are suspended. For a moment, new powers of sentience and response imbue the elements of the scene – as the roses hear, and the jessamine stirs to the dance. The night orchestrates the elements of the scene into a new expressive arrangement, under the influence of the music of the flute, violin and bassoon. The expectation of this lyrical interlude ('She is coming, my own, my sweet' (916/1077)), of course, cruelly and abruptly yield to a characteristic sense of its impossibility, and the traumatized sensibility of the following section, and its brutal confirmation of his isolation.

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To broaden the discussion slightly, a similar pattern of male subjectivity can be clearly discerned in the magnificent monologues composed in the aftermath of Arthur Hallam's death: for instance, 'Ulysses', 'St Simeon Stylites', 'Tithon' or 'Tiresias'. Each masculine protagonist is consumed by this fate of belatedness, and expresses a different reaction to it – respectively endurance, self-mortification, interminable patience and self-sacrifice. Even here, though, as I am suggesting, the gathering atmosphere of impending extinction is intermitted with gleams of inspiration, although in these cases these gleams are located outside of the mundane world, in some unattainable and ever-receding region that impels the spirit. Ulysses cannot but stoically rededicate himself to the impossible pursuit of 'that untravelled world' (20/563), where the soul can express itself in forms adequate to the innermost desires of the 'hungry heart'(12/562). Tiresias ends with an ardent and redemptive vision of the after-life among the Gods, 'while the golden lyre/Is ever sounding in heroic ears/Heroic hymns' (172–4/574). For Tithon and St Simeon Stylites, the only remission is in memory. In the first of the following passages, Tithon thinks back to the time when he was beloved by the goddess Aurora, while, in the second, St Simeon Stylites remembers music's power to bring about consolatory visitations of the divine, in those days when he was 'strong and hale of body' (28/544):

> what time my mortal frame
> Molten in thine immortal, I lay wooed,
> Lips, forehead, eyelids, growing dewy-warm
> With kisses balmier than opening buds;
> Anon the lips that dealt them moved themselves
> In wild and airy whisperings more sweet
> Than the strange song I heard Apollo sing,
> While Ilion like a mist rose into towers. ('Tithon', 46–53/567–8)

> I drowned the whoopings of the owl with sound
> Of pious hymns and psalms, and sometimes saw
> An angel stand and watch me, as I sang.
> Now am I feeble grown; my end draws nigh; ('St Simeon Stylites', 32–5/544)

A different kind of qualified and fated affirmation surfaces in 'The Dying Swan' where the swan's song draws out all the elements of the doleful scene so that its lament or 'death-hymn took the soul/Of that waste place with joy/Hidden in sorrow' (21–3/231–2). The swan's 'awful jubilant voice,/With a music strange and manifold,/Flowed forth on a carol free and bold' (28–30/232). At this point the swan's song apparently anticipates the joys of the afterlife, as in the image at the end of 'Morte d'Arthur' as the dying King departs.[30] In each case, music is associated with a passing surge of dubious joy, at the bar between life and death, as it is in, *In Memoriam*. In LXX, amidst the gloom and ghoulish images of night, the despairing poet strives to remember Hallam's features, before the apparition of memory:

> Till all at once beyond the will
> I hear a wizard music roll,

30 Here are the lines: 'the barge with oar and sail/Moved from the brink, like some full-breasted swan/That, fluting a wild carol ere her death,/Ruffles her pure cold plume, and takes the flood/With swarthy webs' (265–9/596–97).

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And thro' a lattice on the soul
Looks thy fair face and makes it still. (13–16/922)

Transient though the moment is, it appears in fact, like the dream of Hallam, as a turning point in the poet's return from the inner world of grief.

II

My argument so far, then, is that Tennyson's poetry characteristically uses music to register moments of what can paradoxically be called *impossible possibility* for these male figures. In 'Maud' and 'The Lover's Tale', similarly, music figures intervals of love and desire where the lineaments of everyday identity are momentarily transcended, before events confirm that these episodes of ecstatic communion are unactualizable, proscribed. In other poems, the deluded or fixated *personae* of Tennyson's greatest poems cannot help but turn again and again, like Enoch on his island, to some romantic phantasm, or to the real or imagined past, or to some world outside of time or experience, for restorative images of value, expressivity and happiness. The common factor here, however, is that all find this a world where desire cannot be satisfied (at least without some fatal transgression), and where renunciation appears the sole option, as it is for Enoch when he returns home, only to find his wife remarried. Nonetheless, for Tennyson renunciation was projected in many diverse forms, and in this section I want briefly to explore some further examples of this, so as to bring out something of the depth and variety of the metaphysical thinking, the spiritual restlessness, implicit in Tennyson's verse. Looking at a few representative cases, we can use music as a kind of litmus test to reveal Tennyson's shifting conceptions of the nature and value of the physical world, and its relations to the transcendent realm that redeems it. In *The Vision of Sin*, for example, music is imbricated in the vision of licentiousness, whereas in *Idylls of the King* it is co-opted into the workings of grace. In 'In Memoriam' its significance alternates, revealing the poem's own oscillations between religious affirmation, doubt and grief.

The sense of harbouring a disposition to pleasure and joy which can lead nowhere, or from which one is simultaneously shut out, is, I have been arguing, at the heart of Tennyson's work, and in *The Vision of Sin* Tennyson's ambivalence and suspicion of musical pleasure surface perhaps more dramatically than anywhere else in his work. Structurally, this ambivalence is given in the movement from the poem's initial and overwhelming expression of self-forgetful sexual passion, to its ultimate insistence on a condemnatory moralizing framework. So, the transferences and fluidities of identity of the poem's opening are at odds with the self-constituting distance and objectifying moral self of the poem's close. The dreamer of the first lines seemingly merges with the youth who came to the palace gates on 'a horse with wings' (3/718) and who is taken 'by the curls' (6/718) into the palace by the 'child of sin' (5/718).

In the second section, the loss of human separation becomes further dramatized as a collective frenzy of desire affects the assembly:[31]

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31 Tennyson wrote of the poem that it 'describes the soul of a youth who has given himself up to pleasure and Epicureanism. He is at length worn out and wrapt in the mists of saiety. Afterwards he grows into a cynical old man afflicted with the "curse of nature",

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Then methought I heard a mellow sound,
Gathering up from all the lower ground;
Narrowing in to where they sat assembled
Low voluptuous music winding trembled,
Wov'n in circles: they that heard it sighed,
Panted hand-in-hand with faces pale,
Swung themselves, and in low tones replied;
Till the fountain spouted, showering wide
Sleet of diamond-drift and pearly hail;
Then the music touch'd the gates and died;
Rose again from where it seem'd to fail,
Storm'd in orbs of song, a growing gale;
Till thronging in and in, to where they waited,
As 'twere a hundred-throated nightingale,
The strong tempestuous treble throbbed and palpitated;
Ran into its giddiest whirl of sound,
Caught the sparkles, and in circles,
Purple gauzes, golden hazes, liquid mazes,
Flung the torrent rainbow round:
Then they started from their places,
Moved with violence, changed in hue,
Caught each other with wild grimaces,
Half-invisible to the view,
Wheeling with precipitate paces
To the melody, till they flew,
Hair, and eyes, and limbs, and faces,
Twisted hard in fierce embraces,
Like to Furies, like to Graces,
Dash'd together in blinding dew:
Till, kill'd with some luxurious agony,
The nerve-dissolving melody
Fluttered headlong from the sky. (14–45/719–20)

A 'mellow sound' becomes 'Low voluptuous music', and builds up, winding and weaving together the throng into a unanimous responsiveness. Abstracted and automatically they sigh, pant and are swept along. An irrepressible catalyst and symbol of desire, music also passes into, and joins together, all the other physical elements of the scene (as in the earlier examples), catching up the fountain and the nightingale so that the whole palace is momentarily shot through with a physical expressiveness that abolishes self-consciousness, and the apparent separateness of bodies. This collective symphony even conjures psychedelic and rainbow effects of light. For a moment, however, this musical–sexual current seemingly fails as the 'music touch'd the gate and died'. But, it also returns and swells again, infecting all the participants in this second phase with explicitly orgiastic thrashings and twistings. As we might expect, though, in these final lines and this second wave, the moral vision of the poem emerges with a new schematic definiteness. The dreamer begins to separate and disentangle himself, observing what are now increasingly considered as the grotesque, frenzied, intoxicating, violent, dehumanizing aspects of desire.

and joining in the Feast of Death. Then we see the landscape which symbolizes God, Law and the future life.' (Ricks, ed., *The Poems of Tennyson*: 718).

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The implicit moral evaluation and reservations in these lines are, of course, explicit in the rest of the poem, most notably in the corrosive, soured, shrivelled cynicism of the youth, now an old licentious man, in the fourth section of the poem. In the third section, too, there is a careful transition, which enacts the qualitative shift to religious evaluation:

> I saw that every morning, far withdrawn
> Beyond the darkness and the cataract,
> God made Himself an awful rose of dawn (48–50/720)

The speaker now sees the palace in the light of a morning, and in the wider landscape. Ambiguities multiply in the third line – is God immanent in nature, or is nature made by and for him as something he substantially transcends? Is the beauty of nature 'awful', because we trespass to enjoy it, or can we enjoy it if we remain mindful of what we owe the creator? However, everything in the rest of the poem conspires to remind us of our own needful capacities for transcendence, and our status as moral subjects.

If music in *The Vision of Sin*, then, is associated with the corrupting world of unbridled physicality (from which the poem finally dissociates us), in *The Idylls of the King*, it is used, contrarily, in conjunction with the dominant values of renunciation. Nonetheless, in both cases, the world of physical pleasure is treacherous, and must be rejected or sublimated under the influence of a higher, transcendent domain of value. In the *Idylls*, music becomes an instrument of grace, wishfully forging the links between romance, nature, nation and God, as in 'The Marriage of Geraint', where the hero first hears Enid's delicate, clear voice in the castle court before he sees her. Like some one landing on a 'lonely isle' (330/1535), or returning home and hearing the nightingale once more, 'So fared it with Geraint who thought and said,/"Here, by God's grace, is the one voice for me"' (33–4/1536). The drama of this poem, of course, turns on the renunciation of passion as Enid learns of the values of restraint, expressed through the motif of her dress. She has to curb and refuse her feminine pleasure in her 'gorgeous gown', a gift from her mother, in order to remain true to Geraint's regime (739/1547). The identification of music with the Christian values of *The Idylls of the King* can be seen again in 'Guinevere', where musical events punctuate the narrative to underscore the Queen's betrayal, and facilitate her remorse. The bard's hands fall from the harp as he envisions the adultery of Guinevere and Lancelot, and in the convent her penitence overwhelms her as she hums 'an air the nuns had taught her' (160/1729), and requests it again from the nun who 'nothing knows but to obey' (184/1730). The spiritual modulation of passion via shame into grief and resolve here foreshadows her later career as an Abbess, and her abasement in the celebrated scene where Arthur forgives her while 'far off a solitary trumpet blew', summoning him to the battle she has caused (526/1738).[32]

The identification of music with the healing ministrations of grace recalls too important elements in *In Memoriam*. In the early poems the speaker pleads for a

32 There are many such trumpets in Tennyson, as in 'The Charge of the Heavy Brigade at Balaclava', where Scarlett bids his trumpeter 'sound to the charge' (8–9/1305) that led to the decimation of the three hundred of the 'Brave Inniskillens and Greys' (33/1306). In 'Epilogue' the 'Poet', in dialogue with the pacific Irene, identifies his own art with the trumpet's call, as he crowns 'with song/The warrior's noble deed' (35–6/309), since 'The song that nerves a nation's heart,/Is in itself a deed' (79–80/1310).

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reverent faith to restore him so that 'mind and soul, according well,/May make one music as before' ('Prologue', 27–8/863), and he identifies himself with 'him who sings/To one clear harp in divers tones/That men may rise on stepping stones/Of their dead selves to higher things' (I, 1–4/863). Again, in the first Christmas poem, XXX, music becomes a powerful vehicle for a collective response to grief that moves towards the solace and Hope of faith in immortality. In a circle, they sang the 'merry song we sang with him/Last year' (15–16/890), and then they wept before finally:

> Our voices took a higher range;
> Once more we sang: 'They do not die
> Nor lose their mortal sympathy,
> Nor change to us, although they change'; (21–4/890)

Similarly, in LXXXIII music is associated with the momentary sense that sorrow might modulate into hope with the spring:

> O thou, new-year, delaying long,
> Delayest the sorrow in my blood,
> That longs to burst a frozen bud
> And flood a fresher throat with song. (13–16/930)

And towards the end of *In Memoriam*, of course, these links of music with the overcoming of interiority take on greater prominence (though the poem is also stubbornly true to the intractable and incommensurable nature of grief): 'Ring out the grief that saps the mind … Ring out, ring out my mournful rhymes,/But ring the fuller minstrel in' (CVI, 9, 19–20/959). In the 'Epilogue', the poet embraces Hope and life again, seeing 'the songs I made. As echoes out of weaker times' (21–2/982) and Hallam as beyond grief, 'That friend of mind who lives in God' (140/988). He is now one, no 'longer caring to enbalm/In dying songs a dead regret' (13–14/982).

In this way, music is too a figure for redemption, a means of recovering the spontaneous pleasures of happier times. The final marriage reconnects with such events as 'the all-golden afternoon' when 'A guest, or happy sister, sung' and 'brought the harp' into the garden 'and flung a ballad to the brightening moon' (LXXXIX, 25–8/941); or the 'merry merry bells' of Christmases past, which 'controll'd me when a boy'(XXVIII, 20, 18/888); or Hallam's four-year friendship when 'we with singing cheered the way' (XXII, 5/884). However, the power of *In Memoriam* lies in the way it counterpoints moments of affirmation or consolation with its more formative sense of doubt, and of the separate stations, the uncommunicating compartments of loss. So, the poet is often conscious that singing or music offer merely flickerings or gleams of consolation. In XLVIII, he denies that his 'brief lays, of Sorrow born' close off doubt or propose answers – instead they are 'Short swallow-flights of song, that dip/Their wings in tears, and skim away'(XLVIII, 15–16/905). Similarly, in XXXVIII he tells of how 'in the songs I love to sing', 'A doubtful gleam of solace lives' (XXXVIII, 7–8/896). Again, in XCV the poet has a visitation, after the evening songs on the lawn, of the dead man:

> So word by word, and line by line,
> The dead man touched me from the past,

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And all at once it seemed at last
The living soul was flashed on mine,

And mine in this was wound, and whirled
About empyreal heights of thought,
And came on that which is, and caught
The deep pulsations of the world,

Æonian music measuring out
The steps of Time – the shocks of Chance –
The blows of Death. At length my trance
Was cancelled, stricken through with doubt. (33–44/946–7)

III

More cryptic in *In Memoriam*, though (and of specific interest in this section), are those crucial poems where Tennyson is possessed by a deeply feminine aspect of his feeling for Hallam, imagining himself in XCVII as the wife bound by 'plighted vows'. The change of gender appears to bring a firmer sense of happiness, as his spirit becomes that of a wife. The poem ends with a sung affirmation of love that passes masculine understanding:

For him she plays, to him she sings
Of early faith and plighted vows;
She knows but matters of the house,
And he, he knows a thousand things.

Her faith is fixt and cannot move,
She darkly feels him great and wise,
She dwells on him with faithful eyes,
'I cannot understand: I love.' (29–36/950)

In CIII the dream of Hallam is punctuated by music. The poem begins 'within a hall/And maidens with me' (5–6/955). The hall rings 'with harp and carol' as the speaker sees the veiled statute of Hallam, and the inhabitants 'sang of what is wise and good/And graceful' (9–11/956). Then, later on the boat, the speaker falls on Hallam's neck 'in silence' (44/957), before the maidens, complaining, are admitted too on the final voyage:

And while the wind began to sweep
A music out of sheet and shroud,
We steered her toward a crimson cloud
That landlike slept along the deep. (53–6/957)

After this point in the poem, it seems, the poet finds more and more respite from grief. The poem's dream-like suspensions, commutabilities and minglings, the movements and passages, of identity (analogous to the mergings of *The Vision of Sin* in this respect at least) are at one with the exchanges of clouds and land, and life and death, figured as the music swept 'out of sheet and shroud'.[33]

[33] In these ways, then, the muted, singular evocations of musical solace in *In Memoriam* need to be considered always within the seismic shifts, the evolutionary conflicts and jumps

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More particularly, such a transposition of gender is highly suggestive in relation to the affective dimensions of Tennyson's art, and it brings me back to the heuristic conviction underlying this paper: that Tennyson secreted (in both senses) in his work a strain of the self that is best described not so much as homosexual, or androgynous, or sexually confused (as critics have variously and most often argued),[34] but as specifically *feminine*, and which needs to be distinguished from the masculine figurations of the self that often alternate with or succeed it.[35] The oft-noted immured females in Tennyson's early poetry are, on this view, intimately personal, virtual, partial, versions of Tennyson himself.[36] While many critics have touched on this, I am unaware of any who has argued the *essential* nature of what I would call Tennyson's female muse, (what Deleuze and Guattari might call a 'woman-becoming') and its explanatory power for understanding his career as a whole.[37]

In any case, the simultaneous need to express and disown such an ineradicable and fundamental, though purely potential, manifestation of the self explains what one can call the transgendered logic of these early poems. Typically, they arrange themselves between an animating affect of expressive longing – often manifested through music – and a contrary, overwhelming sense that this impulse for feminine self-fulfilment is inexpressible, unacknowledgeable and forbidden. The exiled, central female figure comes to negative insight at the end of these poems: either she can repent and reject her impossible self-projection – her virtual world of shadows and mirrors – and so reconnect with the world through a redemptive renunciation ('The Palace of Art', 'The May Queen'); or she can wait for death in a repetitious experience of detention and sorrow ('Mariana', 'Mariana in the South'); or she can flee (as in 'The Flight'); or, unusually, as in 'Fatima', she can remain dedicated to this illicit, fruitless, sinful and purely imaginative aesthetic, yearning to the end:

> The wind sounds like silver wire,
> And from beyond the noon a fire

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in mood and viewpoint. As such, the representation of music in the poem points to the constitutive experience of self-disjunction within it, and sets it apart from the more determined affirmation of the poem written for the Princess of Wales after the death of her son, the Duke of Clarence, in December 1891 (with its final thumping exclamation, 'Mourn in hope!'). Once again the vocabularies of light and dark mingle with images of music and death: 'The face of Death is toward the Sun of Life,/His shadow darkens earth: his truer name/Is 'Onward,' no discordance in the roll/And march of that Eternal Harmony/Whereto the worlds beat time, though faintly heard/Until the great Hereafter. Mourn in Hope!' (12–17/1450).

34 Alan Sinfield, Kate Millett and Christopher Craft are perhaps the most notable critics to have followed up these possibilities. For fuller reference, see footnote 24.

35 It is my intention to develop this argument more fully in its own terms, bearing in mind that many critics of course – such as Marion Shaw and Marjorie Stone – have made points that intersect with it. Stone in particular has offered a developed reading of Tennyson that relates to what I argue here though it is probably Christopher Ricks whose account of Tennyson in these areas (though implicit and cryptic in mode) appears closest to the more explicit view developed here.

36 'All these ladies […] evolved, like the camel, from my own consciousness' he wrote suggestively (Ricks, ed., *The Poems of Tennyson*: 181).

37 See for instance, Chapter 10 of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Athlone 1988).

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Is poured upon the hills, and nigher
The skies stoop down in their desire;
   And isled in sudden seas of light,
   My heart, pierced through with fierce delight,
   Bursts into blossom in his sight. (29–35/384)

Music is prevalent in many of the poems of the 1830s, as a device that dramatizes and figures the hopeless desires of these protagonists. Œenone seeks relief after Paris's abandonment by rehearsing her 'deepest woe' in music and song:

I am the daughter of a River-God,
Hear me, for I will speak, and build up all
My sorrow with my song, as yonder walls
Rose slowly to a music slowly breathed,
A cloud that gathered shape: for it may be
That, while I speak of it, a little while
My heart may wander from its deepest woe. (37–43/387)

She invokes Apollo's triumphant, creative music but her own song is of a secondary, belated type. Displaced, grief-stricken, her world is symbolized by the now monumental, petrified walls of Troy. The poem invokes a moment of becoming that is endlessly stalled and denied because the circumstances and agents who could fulfil it are located in a semi-imaginary past. Œenone is consumed by memory and impotent yearning, existing in the distinctively Tennyson interval between life and death. She feels the silence that surrounds and will succeed her, and in the absence of her lover she calls repeatedly to Ida to 'hearken ere I die' (63/388). But even as she does so, her words hollow themselves out through sheer repetition, becoming detained and immured in their own fading, rigidifying, echoic pattern.

In 'The Palace of Art' the prefatory, male address to Tench is briefly maintained in the poem proper, before the soul is personified in the female figure, again isolated from the world, and dedicated initially to a life of blissful solitude ('My soul would live alone unto herself/In her high palace there' (11–12/401). Music figures the early pleasures of this seclusion, as she rejoices in her separation from those outside who 'graze and wallow, breed and sleep' (202/414):

   and those great bells
Began to chime. She took the throne:
She sat betwixt the shining Oriels,
      To sing her songs alone […] (157–60/410–11)

No nightingale delighteth to prolong
Her low preamble all alone,
More than my soul to hear her echoed song
      Throb through the ribbed stone.

Singing and murmuring in her feastful mirth,
      Joying to feel herself alive,
Lord over Nature, Lord of the visible earth
      Lord of the senses five (173–80/410–11).

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In the end, of course, this joy yields to the abysmal, nightmarish and guilty sense of her total separation from men and God ('Deep dread and loathing of her solitude/Fell on her' (229–30/417), and this leads her to flee the palace until she has purged her guilt by humble devotion in the cottage in the vale. For the Lady of Shalott, too, music expresses initially the joys of the female artist before it comes to be associated with the opposite sense of her life as a fatal entrapment. To begin with, the lady's song is heard by the reapers outside, as it echoes 'cheerly/From the river winding clearly/Down to towered Camelot' (30–2/356). Music at this point makes a connection with the world she is separated from, but its physical power to make connections is also what undoes her. She hears Sir Lancelot sing '"Tirra Lirra", by the river' (107/359), as she sees his reflection, and fatally turns towards him, before floating down to Camelot where 'They heard her singing her last song' (143/360) as she dies. A similar deepening pattern of isolation and repetition can be detected in 'Mariana in the South' where 'her carol sadder grew' (13/363) as she observes a world where 'No bird would sing, no sheep would bleat' (37/364) before the final eve when 'a dry cicala sung' and she heard 'a sound as of the sea' (85–6/366), and she anticipates death:

> The night comes on that knows not morn,
> When I shall cease to be all alone,
> To live forgotten, and love forlorn. (94–6/367)

These poems of feminine longing and impeded expression can be said to identify and enact forms of musicality, but in dramatically potential, virtual forms only. Their language draws the reader into the inviolable interiority that the poem stages, our inwardness with these maidens making us another counterpart in their expressive impasses, like the cock in 'Mariana' that 'sung out an hour ere light' (27/189) and the 'blue fly' that 'sung in the pane' (63/190). We read 'Mariana', for instance, both as the anonymous figure who observes and hears her, but also as someone whose empathetic surrender to the language of the poem makes us feel with, and *as*, her.

IV

Where the previous section explored those poems where Tennyson explicitly adopts a female persona, there are many other poems – particularly early poems – which involve music in complementary ways, to explore gender identity. Many, for instance, invoke possibilties of fulfilment unregulated by normative social notions. So, as we shall see here, at times Tennyson seeks to elude the felt constrictions of adult gender roles by imaginative flights into the non-human (sea-fairies, merman, mermaid, grasshopper), or into the non-adult (children). At other times, as in the 'English Idyls', he came to seek to embrace normative versions of masculinity, through the rehearsals that resulted were somewhat factitious. Finally, the discussion of 'The Princess' that closes this article offers a reading of the poem as Tennyson's most sustained imaginative attempt to overcome the separation of masculine and feminine within society, as well as within the self.

In many poems, for instance, an unfallen natural music is celebrated, as in 'The Grasshopper',[38] or 'The Poet's Mind' where the sophist-rationalist is contradicted

[38] In 'The Grasshopper', the insect's unconscious and spontaneous 'youth sunny and

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by the poem's affirmation of the garden where 'the merry bird chants' (22/225), though it 'would fall to the ground if you came in'(23/225), and where a fountain drawing from heaven, 'sings a song of undying love'(33/225). In 'Song' ['The winds, as at their hour of birth'] the winds and the streams sing songs of unhindered youthful freedom:

> The winds, as at their hour of birth,
> Leaning upon the ridgèd sea,
> Breathed low around the rolling earth
> With mellow preludes, 'We are free.' (1–4/254)

In 'Dualisms', two bees harmoniously 'hum a lovelay to the westwind at noontide' (2/253) and 'two birds of glancing feather/Do woo each other, carolling together' and two children sing (8–9/253). The second verse dilates with Tennyson's rhapsodic unfolding of the vision of these 'goldenlockèd', befrocked children, the last line interestingly echoing (among so many interchanges) *Cymbeline*, Tennyson's favourite play:

> Two children lovelier than Love adown the lea are singing,
> As they gambol, lilygarlands ever stringing:
> Both in blosmwhite silk are frocked:
> Like, unlike, they roam together
> Under a summervault of golden weather;
> Like, unlike, they sing together
> Side by Side,
> MidMay's darling goldenlockèd,
> Summer's tanling diamondeyed. (14–22/254)

A similar playful exuberance is figured in 'The Merman' and 'The Mermaid', where erotic and sexual fulfilment are celebrated, in the altered seaworld of Tennyson's imagination, while 'the wave would make music above us afar' ('The Merman', 22/194). Music rolls through the poems, signalling its inclusive and mobile affective world:

> And if I should carol aloud, from aloft
> All things that are forkèd, and hornèd, and soft
> Would lean out from the hollow sphere of the sea,
> All looking down for the love of me. ('The Mermaid', 52–5/195–6)[39]

Of course, following the discomfiting elements in the reviews of his early work – with the repeated emphasis on effiminacy, lack of human qualities, social disengagement, and so on – we can see Tennyson's poetry as increasingly marked by the need to reconcile his muse with his inevitable preoccupation with his poetic

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free' (29/235) expresses itself in his ability to: 'Carol clearly, bound along,/Soon the joy is over,/A summer of loud song' (30–32/235). 'What hast thou to do with evil/In thine hour of love and revel[…]?' asks Tennyson (34–5/235).

[39] The erotic association of music and the sea can be seen again in 'The Sea-Fairies', who seek to entice the 'weary mariners' by their songs (1/255), with their 'bosoms prest/To little harps of gold' (3–4/255).The music that they sing is 'shrill' (6/255), but they promise the idyllic life of sweet kisses and ravishing natural beauty, as they 'will sing to you all the day' (20/256), where the rainbow hangs 'over the islands free' (26/256).

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self-fashioning within Victorian literary culture and society. So, his inimitable lyricism became increasingly yoked to public themes. Idylls such as 'The Gardener's Daughter' determinedly seek the solid, external grounding of a masculine romance. The poet falls in love with the woman to the sound of the bells, and makes her vow in 'three little words/More musical than ever came in one' (227–8/520). Music here figures and underwrites sexual difference as part of the poem's larger stabilizing of identity:

> From the woods
> Came voices of the well-contented doves.
> The lark could scarce get out his notes for joy,
> But shook his song together as he neared
> His happy home, the ground. To the left and right,
> The cuckoo told his name to the hills;
> The mellow ouzel fluted in the elm;
> The redcap whistled; and the nightingale
> Sang loud, as though he were the bird of day. (87–95/512–13)

Music can heal disjunction and overcome interiority, as at the end of that much darker (though contemporaneous) poem 'The Two Voices'. Madness and despair are exorcised when 'The sweet church bells began to peal' (408/540), and while a 'little whisper silver-clear'(427/540), 'like an Aeolian harp' reveals to the hero the hope that the world is unified by love (436/541). So he turns from the barren voice of desolation:

> I wondered, while I paced along:
> The woods were filled so full with song,
> There seemed no room for sense of wrong; (454–6/541)

So, throughout the 'English Idyls' music underscores the joyful rehearsal of masculine identity and companionship. In 'The Miller's Daughter' songs seal marriage, and the narrator remembers music's role in bringing them together – the love song in his mind precedes the call of the doves and the girl's singing, which accompany his first falling in love with her, and later he is 'To move about the house with joy/And with the certain step of man' (95–6/376). Similarly, in 'Audley Court' the friendship of the two men is cemented through trading songs:

> So sang we each to either, Francis Hale,
> The farmer's son, who lived across the bay,
> My friend; and I (73–5/707)

This reconciliatory impulse continues, in an altered form in 'The Princess', where it seeks to smooth away differences between the genders, including the genders within the self. Christopher Ricks has observed the generally 'calmative' tenor of the poem (a poem, he says, whose 'intricate failure goes to much that is deepest in Tennyson'[40]), as it seeks to negotiate the aesthetic, political and gender disjunctions or conflicts that it raises.[41] In terms of music of the poem, this can be described as the wishfully peaceable co-existence within this 'medley' of different

40 Ricks, *Tennyson*: 180.
41 Ibid.: 183.

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kinds of music.[42] At the beginning, as the tenants, locals and Institute members meet on Sir Walter Vivian's 'broad lawns' ('Prologue', 2/743), we read:

> the twangling violin
> Struck up with Soldier-laddie, and overhead
> The broad ambrosial aisles of lofty lime
> Made noise with bees and breeze from end to end. (85–8/746)

Loftiness and aspiration in this poem are matters of inclusive kinds of expression, as the potentially disjunctive onomatopoeia of 'twangling' is accommodated and subdued within the alliterative pedal pointing, the softening cadence, of the closing lines. What these lines suggest, as an enactment of the ethics and politics of the poem, is that potentially disruptive differences (say, between Soldier-laddies and girls or the landed gentry, or between 'breeze' and 'bees') can modulate into harmonious interchange and co-existence. Sound conveys a poetic world where different purposes or desires can be managed and resolved, 'end to end', within a redemptive recreational space, like that afforded by Sir Vivian here, or the Institute or the University, or these 'broad lines', so to speak, of the verse itself. It is a world where similarity subdues and conjures away the threats of difference: where empathetic men in female garb can infiltrate a female domain; where a woman such as Ida can take on positive male attributes; where the imaginings of 'sweet girl-graduates in their golden hair' ('Prologue', 42/747) can be explored; and where potentially fatal masculine conflicts can be managed in the dissimilated form of a tournament.

The different values at play within the world of the poem can be seen as wrapped within its types of music – the nightingale 'rapt in her song and careless of the snare' which greets the Prince's party at the gates of the College (I, 218/758); the chapel bells and the great organ within; the trumpet that blares forth at the tournament … . However, finally, the most powerful and significant evocations of music are in the songs – of regret at loss, but also of reconciliation and restoration – that the women sing between 'the rougher voices' of the male narrators ('Prologue', 237/751). The poem's values of the overcoming of opposites, as of 'the two-celled heart' made up of male and female (VII, 289/839), are often played out in these poems. Again, this is evident in the revivification of buried incarnations of the self in 'Tears, Idle Tears', the '*earliest* pipe of half-awakened birds/To *dying* ears' (IV, 32/785), or the *fresh* beam 'glittering on a sail,/ That brings our friends up from the *underworld*' (IV, 26–7/785), or as in the supremely beautiful love lyrics ('Now sleeps the crimson petal' or 'Come down, O maid') that alternate male and female personae while calling for, and enacting, a dream-like merging or congress between them.

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42 Ricks, ed., *The Poems of Tennyson*: 741.

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