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TENNYSONIAN TOPOGRAPHY

                                                        the name
            Went wandering somewhere darkling in his mind.
                                            The Last Tournament

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In all the length and breadth of the *Idylls of the King*[1] - that
great serial poem, the much-laboured, little-loved, often lovely,
sometimes lamentable work that occupied most of Tennyson's creative
life - there are surprisingly few place-names. Here is a Britain
of uncertain date, a Victorian-Celtico-Tudoresque realm. Here be
adventures. Here are tales of unremitting restlessness, in which
people are ever setting spur to steed, riding on quests, succouring
damsels, cheering churls, tilting in tournaments, getting lost,
getting found, committing adultery, murder, treason, pitting them-
selves against each other and against the hordes of brute barbarism;
and the map of all this activity is strangely blank. Camelot -
Caerleon - Astolat - Tintagel - Lyonesse - the names that plot or
pinpoint the action of the poem are few indeed.

     So different, in this respect, is Tennyson's major source,
Malory. Malory's text abounds in names, sometimes confusingly;
when he cannot discover one, he invents one; he has an onomastic
passion that might recommend him to the president of a learned
society. He does not allow his readers to languish in the yearning
for exactitude that has set some scholars pointlessly searching for
Arthurian locations. He confidently identifies Camelot with
Winchester, and Astolat with Guildford. He makes London, as much
as Camelot, a centre of critical events. (Riding to rescue
Guinevere, Lancelot takes to the water at Westminster Bridge and
makes his horse "swymme over the Temmys unto Lambyth"[2].) Where the
French romancers report in general terms the arrival of the conquer-
ing Arthur in "la Grant Bretaigne", Malory documents the port of
entry as Dover. He is always the realist, but judicious in his
realism, willing to distinguish knowledge from hearsay. Of Joyous
Garde he observes that "Somme men say it was Anwyk, somme men say
it was Bamborow"; and of Lancelot's native region of Benwick -
reached unmysteriously, in the normal way of commercial traffic, by
ship from Cardiff - he reports that "som men calle hit Bayan"
(Bayonne) "and some men calle hit Beawme" (Beaune) "where the wyne
of Beawme ys". He is also as precise as a man can be without bene-
fit of grid-references. The stronghold in which Sir Mellyagaunt
holds Guinevere prisoner is described as "a castell of the gyffte
of King Arthure within seven myle of Westemynster"; and when Merlin
meets King Uther at "the castel of Terrabyl" (in the French sources,

Tarabel), he helpfully informs him that "the castel of Tyntygaill"
(Tintagel) "is but ten myles hens". Malory, in short, tries by all
realistic means to put a recognizable Realm of Arthur on to the
map.

Whether he actually regarded himself as a chronicler of his-
torical fact, or whether this was simply the narrative posture he
found most effective and convenient to adopt, there can be no doubt
of his intention to present "real" people living and acting in
"real" places. Eugene Vinaver notes:

> M[alory]'s tendency to localize the story and to
> refer the place-names he found in his source to
> real places is noticeable throughout . . . , and it
> has the effect, which he no doubt desired to
> achieve, of transferring the action from the vague
> fairyland of romance to a precise and familiar
> geographical setting.[3]

This is admirably observed, and in making the right point about
Malory's abundant·concern for names and topographical references,
it invites a corresponding observation about the apparent paucity
of these things in Tennyson's Arthuriad: there, the aim is clearly
not to establish "a precise and familiar geographical setting", but
rather to transfer the action *back to* "the vague fairyland of
romance", or perhaps to a vague hinterland of the symbolism
described by Tennyson as a "parabolic drift".[4] Not for him the
posture of chronicler; he thought of his tales of ancient time as
raising timeless concerns - civilization, mind, order, control, the
haplessly chaotic struggle against chaos. Possibly there was more
to be learned about these things in fairyland than from the charts
of reality. He studied other authors than Malory; he was deeply
read in Spenser; he knew the *Mabinogion*; and even in Malory himself
he could hardly fail to find intimations of myth and magic, rumours
of an old symbolic order under the tidied and tabarded histories.
His concern with place was a poet's concern with tropes, and with a
form of symbolism; not *toponymic*, therefore, so much as *topothetic*.

Topothesia, a standard device in classical and mediaeval
literary rhetoric, attaches to places in narrative a significance
that goes beyond simple location.[5] Indeed, location in the car-
tographer's sense of the word is barely relevant. Topothesia
assigns a *setting*, and the setting may have a general symbolic
significance (the castle, the cave, the clearing in the forest), or
a structural significance in the design of the narrative (the
humble cottage versus the lordly mansion), or, less powerfully, a
conventional significance as a kind of iconographic punctuation
(after the wild wood comes the tower of the temptress, and the
perilous ocean yields to the enchanted isle). Now topothetic
passages are frequent in *Idylls of the King*, and are generally
linked to the rudimentary schemes of "oppositive" symbolism with
which Tennyson invests his sequence of poems (sun-moon, day-night,
land-sea, field-forest, man-beast, music-speech, nearness-farness,
&c). That such passages are often free from toponymic reference is

hardly surprising; identifiable locations in "real" domains resist
the free play and free trade of fantasy - the more mapping the less
mumming, so to speak. Nevertheless, it is hardly possible for
Tennyson to exercise his topothetic invention without an occasional
gesture towards toponymy. To frame the narrative, some outline of
Arthur's realm has to be sketched, however perfunctorily, with a
few names for the reader to take as signposts of a sort; then there
are the more important habitations of the action - Camelot, the
castles; then at last there are the badlands and the bogeylands and
the barrenlands, where names are dangerous and big images rule the
roost. For anyone interested in the poetic process, here is a
fascinating gradation, from naming to half-naming and so into the
escape from naming.

Names in the realm

At the end of *The Coming of Arthur*, Tennyson declares that his
hero, having overcome the heathen in twelve great battles, "made a
realm and reigned". It would actually be rather hard for anyone
unprimed in Arthurian matters to deduce, from the remaining *Idylls*,
the shape and constituency of this realm. One of the few passages
of composite topography occurs in *The Coming of Arthur* itself,
where Tennyson lists the petty kings and kingdoms banded against
Arthur, and overthrown by him in his grand exercise of military
pacification:

> And leading all his knighthood threw the kings
> Carados, Urien, Cradlemont of Wales,
> Claudias, and Clariance of Northumberland,
> The King Brandagoras of Latangor,
> With Anguisant of Erin, Morganor,
> And Lot of Orkney.   (*CA* 110-15)

This of course is a conventional *topos* of a kind found in classical
poetry, in mediaeval romance, in Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton: the
list of heroes, chiefs, territories, battles. Tennyson's essay in
the device is interesting for two reasons. First, we can compare
it with his source, Malory, and note how he has made phonaesthetic
adjustments to please his own ear. The origin of the passage is
the first book of Malory's *Tale of King Arthur*, where we find
Claudas (who becomes "Claudias"), *Uryens* (changed to "Urien"), and,
for "Cradlemont", *Cradilmans*, *Cradilmente*, or *Cradilmante* (also
known as Cardilmans, alias Cradulmas; in the French romances,
Tradelinant, Tradelmant, Tradelmans, Tradelmas). "Clariance of
Northumberland" first appears in Malory as *Clarivaus*, then as
Clarivauns or *Clarivaunce*, then finally in the form adopted by
Tennyson, *Claryaunce*. The name Anguisant is another piece of
Tennysonian remodelling. He is the subject of more spelling
variants than practically any other personage in Malory -
Angwysshauns, *Angwyshaunce*, *Angwysauns*, *Anguysauns*, *Agwysaunce*,
Angwyshe, inter alia - but never figures in the form *Anguisant*.
Possibly the change of his name's final consonant from a fricative
[s] to an alveolar stop [t] was motivated by the impulse of the

alveolar consonants [d], [t], in the preceding line, "The King Brandagoras of Latangor". That particular line constitutes the boldest stroke of invention, phonaesthetic and semiotic, in the whole passage. This Disneyland despot, The King Brandagoras - the definite article is a shrewd touch - figures in Malory as *Brandegoris*, or *Brandygoris*, or *Brangoris*, *King of Strangore* (in French, "de la Terre d' Estrogoire"). "Latangore" is entirely of Tennyson's invention. It chimes with Morganore (in line 114); it is rhythmically interesting; most important of all, it manifests, in combination with *Brandagoras*, those sonorities of open back vowels, nasal consonants, and approximants ([r], [l]), which Tennyson found particularly attractive. The list of chiefs thus becomes, in part, an exercise in rhythms and sonorities.

It is also in part a semiotic exercise, and here is its other point of source-exploiting interest. The domains of these petty rulers are to become the under-kingdoms of the great Arthurian empire; therefore in naming them, we name much of the realm. Once more, Tennyson adjusts Malory, in whose text Cradilmans is King of North Wales, Angwysshauns is "of Irlonde" (the name *Erin* does not occur in Malory), and Lot (OFr. Loth) is the eponymous ruler of Lothian and Orkney. Uryens, we learn is king "of the land of Goore" (a phrase which may have given Tennyson his hint for *Latangor*), and also numbered among the insurgent kings is one "Idres of Cornuwaile". In Tennyson, this list is adroitly shortened and simplified. Cradlemont is given a much bigger king-dom; Anguisant is given a realm with a more romantic sound (at least to ears trained in Victorian parlour balladry); and Lot's portion in Lothian is ignored. J.M. Gray comments ingeniously on the allusion to Lot and his modified kingdom:

> . . . it is at the end of a geographical progression
> outwards in being at the very periphery, Orkney,
> suggesting that the weight and scope of opposition
> to Arthur is almost total . . . If Tennyson in a
> note said 'The kingdom of Orkney and Lothian com-
> posed the North and East of Scotland', he nonetheless
> knew the reader would take the modern sense first, a
> few scattered islands north of the Scottish mainland.[6]

Gray is probably right here; Tennyson - especially in the *Idylls* - is an adept in the art of eating an ancient phrase and having a modern meaning. He certainly knows that the reader will "take the modern sense" of Northumberland and Wales, will take the romantic sense of Erin, will take the distant sense of Orkney, and will take the grave nonsense of *Latangor* - just such a name as might, in latter days, have denoted some fearful fief in Professor Tolkien's Middle-Earth. This is the realm of the *Idylls*. Somewhere west by south-west is sea-girt Lyonesse, and somewhere on the fairyland compass is Camelot.

Camelot as topotheme

In the rhetoric of the *Idylls*, Camelot is a topotheme. It is
the place of places, the ethical and aesthetic centre of things.
All other places are implicitly or explicitly compared with it; and
the concrete imagery of its architecture and decoration becomes the
ideational imagery of the poetic cycle. It is Merlin's artefact,
a city built to music, with music's elusive interplay of substance
and idea. Merlin tells the young Gareth:

>   And Fairy Queens have built the city, son;
>   They came from out a sacred mountain-cleft
>   Toward the sunrise, each with harp in hand,
>   And built it to the music of their harps.
>   And, as thou sayest, it is enchanted, son,
>   For there is nothing in it as it seems
>   Saving the King; though some there be that hold
>   The King a shadow, and the city real:
>   . . . .
>   For an ye heard a music, like enow
>   They are building still, seeing the city is built
>   To music, therefore never built at all,
>   And therefore built for ever.   (*GL* 255-62, 271-4)

"Therefore never built at all and therefore built for ever" - this
is certainly not Winchester. The theme of music, song, harmony, as
something that unifies, something expressive of joy and creative-
ness, something controlled by an inner order, and something ulti-
mately fugitive and intangible, is one of the master-symbols of the
Idylls, and it has its root in the topotheme of Camelot.

Camelot therefore cannot be located. It is the place that
never was and always is, a concept, an intuition, a moral sense.
Tennyson, however, gets trapped in his own paradox; there are times
when this numinous place has to be realistically represented. That
is why, in the *Idylls*, there are two ways of looking at Camelot:
from within the gates, when it has a quaint and corbelled concrete-
ness, and from without, when it is much less solidly Victorian-
antique and much more like the hallucinations of mediaeval magic or
modern narcosis. Camelot-within-the-gates is described by Sir
Percevale, in *The Holy Grail*:

>   O brother, had you known our Camelot
>   Built by old kings, age after age, so old
>   The King himself had fears that it would fall,
>   So strange, and rich, and dim; for where the roofs
>   Tottered toward each other in the sky,
>   Met foreheads all along the street of those
>   Who watched us pass; and lower, where the long
>   Rich galleries, lady-laden, weighed the necks
>   Of dragons clinging to the crazy walls,
>   Thicker than drops from thunder, showers of flowers
>   Fell as we past; and men and boys astride
>   On wyvern, lion, dragon, griffin, swan,

> At all the corners, named us each by name . . .
>   (*HG* 339-51)

Here we have seemingly forgotten the work of the Fairy Queens, and
the city that is always a-building; this Camelot is the creation of
"old kings", and is evidently in need of a competent Clerk of Works.
It is hard to escape the suspicion that its ornate fancies
represent Tennyson's own architectural tastes. R.B. Martin,
describing the house the Laureate built at Aldworth in Sussex,
writes:

> . . . it would be difficult to imagine an archi-
> tectural style less suited to the simple heath and
> expansive view than the hard-edged, elaborate carving
> of the crockets, pinnacles , and arches of the house
> that Knowles designed . . . There were emblazoned
> shields on the windows, a motto cut into the stone
> of the cornice under the roof, corbels, arcades,
> parapets, heraldic beasts and birds . . . It was as
> if Tennyson were trying to demonstrate how a country
> house should be built.[7]

Professor Martin quotes a guide to Sussex which describes Aldworth
(now in commercial hands) as "a fussy small hotel half-way between
the French and English C16 style". That would be a devastatingly
accurate characterization of the gadzookery and joyaunce of the
Idylls, in those passages where Tennyson attempts to depict or
evoke the substance of the chivalric world.

The "interior" account of Camelot includes a representation of
Arthur's hall, the crown of the whole civic edifice:

> O brother, had you known our mighty hall,
> Which Merlin built for Arthur long ago!
> For all the sacred mount of Camelot,
> And all the dim rich city, roof by roof,
> Tower after tower, spire beyond spire,
> By grove, and garden-lawn, and rushing brook,
> Climbs to the mighty hall that Merlin built,
> And four great zones of sculpture, set betwixt
> With many a mystic symbol, gird the hall;
> And in the lowest beasts are slaying men,
> And in the second men are slaying beasts,
> And on the third are warriors, perfect men,
> And on the fourth are men with growing wings,
> And over all one statue in the mould
> Of Arthur . . .   (*HG* 225-39)

The streets of the city may ramble crazily, but here all is para-
bolic symmetry. This continues in the description of the hall's
interior:

> And, brother, had you known our hall within,
> Broader and higher than any in all the lands!

> Where twelve great windows blazon Arthur's wars,
> And all the light that falls upon the board
> Streams through the twelve great battles of our King.
> Nay, one there is, and at the eastern end,
> Wealthy with wandering lines of mount and mere,
> Where Arthur finds the brand Excalibur,
> And also one to the west, and counter to it,
> And blank; and who shall blazon it? when and how? –
> O there, perchance, when all our wars are done,
> The brand Excalibur will be cast away.   (*HG* 246-57)

The answer to Percevale's question, "who shall blazon it? when and
how?", is, of course, "Alfred Tennyson, in *The Passing of Arthur*".
The poet's own presence intentionally shadows the text, with this
artful reminder that he has begun the symbols of Camelot, and he
will complete the pattern.

Camelot-without-the-gates is much less solid and programmatic.
The gate itself, to be sure, is as busily and betokeningly decorated
as the exterior of the great hall. Thus, in *Gareth and Lynette*:

> For barefoot on the keystone, which was lined
> And rippled like an ever-floating wave,
> The Lady of the Lake stood; all her dress
> Wept from her sides as water flowing away;
> But like the cross her great and goodly arms
> Stretched under all the cornice and upheld:
> And drops of water fell from either hand;
> And down from one a sword was hung, from one
> A censer, either worn with wind and storm;
> And o'er her breast floated the sacred fish;
> And in the space to the left of her, and right,
> Were Arthur's wars in weird devices done,
> New things and old co-twisted, as if Time
> Were nothing, so inveterately, that men
> Were giddy gazing there; and over all
> High on the top were those three Queens, the friends
> Of Arthur, who should help him at his need.
>   Then those with Gareth for so long a space
> Stared at the figures, that at last it seemed
> The dragon-boughts and elvish emblemings
> Began to move, seethe, twine and curl: they called
> To Gareth, 'Lord, the gateway is alive'.   (*GL* 210-31)

"New things and old co-twisted, as if Time were nothing",
might be read as a declaration of stylistic intent for the *Idylls*
themselves. As for the description of the gate, it begins with
dutiful invocations of Christian imagery ("like a cross", "the
sacred fish"), but ends in fairyland, with "the dragon-boughts and
elvish emblemings". And with that the city is no longer solid-
seeming. "The gateway is alive"; and seen from a distance, the
entire fabric seems shifty and evanescent. So Gareth and his com-
panions first see it:

> Far off they saw the silver-misty morn
> Rolling her smoke about the Royal mount,
> That rose between the forest and the field.
> At times the summit of the high city flashed;
> At times the spires and turrets half-way down
> Pricked through the mist; at times the great gate shone
> Only, that opened on the field below;
> Anon, the whole fair city disappeared.   (*GL* 187-93)

This is not the cartographer's Camelot, nor yet the architect's,
nor the set-designer's; this is the Camelot of poetic fable,
wrapped in mist, as Arthur's legend is wrapped in mist, as the last
battle of all will be fought in the daylong mist. Tennyson
repeatedly calls his capital "the dim rich city"; and also, lifting
an epithet from Milton, "the slope city", with reference to its
prominent position on a steep hill. Of this city his characters
have different visions. It appears in hallucination to Sir
Percevale, on the Grail quest:

> And I rode on and found a mighty hill,
> And on the top a city walled; the spires
> Pricked with incredible pinnacles into heaven.   (*HG* 421-3)

For Percevale, the vision is not only "incredible", but also
insubstantial; it dissolves in a moment. For Sir Pelleas,
betrayed by Gawain and the Lady Etarre, the sight of Camelot on its
hill is all too hatefully solid:

> but when he saw
> High up in heaven the hall that Merlin built,
> Blackening against the dead-green stripes of even,
> 'Black nest of rats', he groaned, 'ye build too high'.
> (*PE* 541-4)

Music; mist; enchanted; sacred mount; black nest of rats; these are
the poetic appellations, the periphrases, the metonymies of
Camelot.

Towers, and topothetic counterparts

     The towers of Camelot are not the only castellations in the
Idylls. Other habitations are found here and there in the epic
landscape, and some of these are named; for example, Astolat,
which Tennyson at one time had called Shalott, following an
Italian novella relating how *la Damigella di Scalot morì per amore
di Lancialotto de Lac*;[8] and Carbonek, the Grail castle, in Malory
called Corbenic, or Pounte de Corbyn, the description of which, in
The Holy Grail 810-37, closely follows Malory, though the latter's
account is in this instance much more mysterious and unearthly.

     In two of his *Idylls*, Tennyson makes castles or halls into
topothetic counterparts, and hence into contrasting or complementary
emblems; interestingly enough, though perhaps coincidentally, in
each case one of the counterparts is named and the other remains

nameless. This is clearly marked in the first of the two examples,
where one of the halls is Camelot itself, centre of civilized
values, and the other an anti-habitation, emblematic of barbarity.
The contrast is the iconographic nucleus of the poem *Balin and
Balan*, in which Sir Balin, a disturbed and ferocious personality,
is driven to distraction by his discovery of Guinevere's adulterous
love for Lancelot. He rides furiously away, deep into the forest,
not stopping until

>   the castle of a King, the hall
> Of Pellam, lichen-bearded, grayly draped
> With streaming grass appeared, low-built but strong,
> The ruinous donjon as a knoll of moss,
> The battlement overtopt with ivytods,
> A home of bats, in every tower an owl.   (*BB* 325-31)

There is a cunning touch of Tennyson here in *ivytods*, a rhythmic
and consonantal reflection of "overtopt", and a literary borrowing,
caught in the first instance from *The Rime of The Ancient Mariner*
and the Hermit's description of

> Brown skeletons of leaves that lag
> My forest-brook along:
> When the ivy-tod is heavy with snow,
> And the owlet whoops to the wolf below,
> That eats the she-wolf's young.

This word alone helps to fix the passage in the mind; it assumes
something like the function of a name.

     The low-built, overgrown house - the description of which, in
"lichen-bearded" and "grayly draped", curiously suggests the
personality of its master - is less like a hall than the dray or
warren of some woodland animal. It has been described, earlier in
the poem, by Arthur's ambassadors, as "bushed about with gloom".
This sombre place invites obvious contrast with lofty, light-
aureoled Camelot. Pellam's castle, though strongly built, is a
prisoner of its setting, besieged by a disorderly nature, to which
it has been passively surrendered; the "mount of Camelot", on the
other hand, towers up in earnest of Arthur's benign empire, and
with its "four great zones of sculpture" expresses the ascendancy
of Man over Nature, humanity's rise out of feral savagery.

     The interior of Pellam's hall is a dark hollow scarcely
resisting the ingressive melancholy of the wild wood that crawls
and sprawls outside. Tennyson describes how Sir Balin

>   found the greetings both of knight and King
> Faint in the low dark hall of banquet; leaves
> Laid their green faces flat against the panes,
> Sprays grated, and the canker'd boughs without
> Whined in the wood; for all was hush'd within . . .
>   (*BB* 337-41)

Balin's reception in this "low dark" place contrasts pointedly with
his earlier welcome in the high hall of Camelot:

> With joy that blazed itself in woodland wealth
> Of leaf, and gayest garlandage of flowers,
> Along the walls and down the board; they sat,
> And cup clash'd cup; they drank and some one sang,
> Sweet-voiced, a song of welcome, whereupon
> Their common shout in chorus, mounting, made
> Those banners of twelve battles overhead
> Stir . . .   (*BB* 79-87)

Here are marked topothetic contrasts: wholesome nature - "gayest
garlandage of flowers" - versus nature sinister and sick - "the
canker'd boughs without"; the "faint greetings" of knight and King
versus the "common shout in chorus"; and most significant of all,
the opposition of "sweet-voiced" song and the disaffected wilder-
ness's grating and whining. The music of Camelot is not heard in
this place, for this nameless "donjon" is Camelot's anti-topic.

    The other instance of a topothetic contrast is no less power-
ful, and no less central to the poem in which it occurs, *The Last
Tournament*. In this poem, Tennyson's version of the Tristram
story, Sir Tristram is a recreant knight, one of the new order
whose cynical rejection of old notions of chivalric honour both
heralds and symbolizes the fall of Camelot. Tristram's counterpart
is the renegade Sir Pelleas, the quondam idealist who, driven to
despair by the caprice of a vicious woman (Etarre) and the oppor-
tunism of a corrupted man (Gawain), has denounced Camelot as an
edifice of lewd hypocrisy, and has fled into exile to establish his
own frankly bestial counter-court "in the North". He is never
mentioned by name in *The Last Tournament*, where he is called only
"the Red Knight".

    The Red Knight's open challenge to the power of Camelot forces
Arthur to undertake a punitive expedition. The *Idyll* describes how
the King, with a hundred men,

> Rode far, till o'er the illimitable reed,
> And many a glancing plash and sallowy isle,
> The wide-wing'd sunset of the misty marsh
> Glared on a huge machicolated tower
> That stood with open doors, whereout was rolled
> A roar of riot . . .   (*LT* 420-25)

This passage, and the scene that follows, has been the object of
some adverse criticism, mainly on the grounds of topographic vague-
ness - which seems an unreasonable, and indeed misguided objection.
It would be a stern judge indeed who would refuse to acknowledge the
power of Tennysonian artifice here. The sense of marshiness that
the first two lines convey is created by phonetic suggestion rather
than visual image. Vague generalized indications of reeds and
sallows could not of themselves account for the sensory conviction
of these lines, in which the moist earth squelches under the

traversing hooves. And then comes the word *machicolated*, as one of
those "opaque" lexical items which Tennyson so often uses to engage
and distract his readers; such words create their own strenuous
impressions, and at the same time divert attention from some con-
textual piece of legerdemain. In this case, the trick in the back-
ground is making the resplendent lyric image, "the wide-wing'd
sunset of the misty marsh" the subject of the verb "glared". The
result is a personifying illusion, suggesting the terrible frowning
presence of some red angel presiding over the lawless marsh; but
machicolated takes attention away while the illusion is worked.

While the tower in the North is under assault, Sir Tristram
rides to the south and westward, deep into the woods of Lyonesse,
until he reaches

> Tintagil, half in sea and high on land,
> A crown of towers.   (*LT* 504-5)

There, the description continues,

>   Down in a casement sat,
> A low sea-sunset glorying round her hair
> And glossy-throated grace, Isolt the Queen.
> And when she heard the feet of Tristram grind
> The spiring stone that scaled about her tower,
> Flushed, started, met him at the doors, and there
> Belted his body with her white embrace . . . (*LT* 505-11)

The last line is perhaps one of Tennyson's less successful *tours de
force*; but it reminds us, at least, that *this* tower's occupant also
has a symbolic colour. This is Isolt the White, a figure no less
fatal than the Red Knight. Other lexical details prompt comparison
with the "tower in the North". There, the "wide-wing'd sunset of
the misty marsh" *glared* on the tower; here, the "low sea-sunset" is
described as *glorying* (ie. "with glory" and "like a *gloria*, or
halo") round the hair of Isolt, the tower's occupant. Here, too,
a tricky lexis permits the formation of latent images; *scaled*, for
example - at one level merely a synonym for *climb*, phonaesthetically
dictated by the running consonantal/alliterative pattern of
"Tri*s*tram" - "*s*piring" - "*s*tone" - "*s*caled" - "*s*tarted" - is at
another level an ambivalent word, suggesting that the tower is
"scaled", like some petrified dragon or sea-beast, by the investing
stone. So often in Tennyson, what his words put into play is not
so much a type of ambiguity or ambivalence, as the shiftiness of a
wayward insight tugging against an overt intent. This deceptive-
ness in his diction corresponds well with Valerie Pitt's astute
observation that: "There is a constant play between Tennyson's
apprehensions of the shifting world of sense, and the symbols in
which he has defined and crystallized his meditations on that
world."[9] In the shifting world of Idyllic sense, people and places
may not only lose their names, but also their natures as human
identities or habitations; they are transformed, and become images
of the wild.

The wild wood and the bad places

The mount of Camelot stands "between the forest and the field", in accordance with the general symbolism of the *Idylls*, in which mountains are for visions and endeavours, fields for dutiful human ordinariness, and the forest or the desert for peril, misadventure, anarchy, madness. When Balin and Pelleas go mad, they take the wilderness road. The dissident Tristram is called by Tennyson "Sir Tristram of the Woods" - as though to emphasize his apostasy from the values of the urban court - and indeed characterizes himself as "woodman of the woods".

The wilderness is overwhelmingly a place of horror and nightmare. Even when the narrative accommodates a "good place", a *locus amoenus*, in the tradition of mediaeval romance, the amenity is sinister, foreboding some unpleasant turn of events. So Pelleas, riding "at noon . . . across the forest called of Dean", is almost overcome by the heat -

> but saw
> Near him a mound of even-sloping side,
> Whereon a hundred stately beeches grew,
> And here and there great hollies under them;
> But for a mile all round was open space,
> And fern and heath; and slowly Pelleas drew
> To that dim day, then binding his good horse
> To a tree, cast himself down; and as he lay
> At random looking over the brown earth
> Through the green-glooming twilight of the grove,
> It seemed to Pelleas that the fern without
> Burnt as a living fire of emeralds,
> So that his eyes dazzled looking at it.   (*PE* 23-35)

Here is a demonstration of a classic theme - a shady place in a "mixed" forest (convention demands the naming of more than one kind of tree) where the weary knight may take his rest. But the "dazzle" of those closing lines is the glitter of a fatal hallucination; the lady Etarre is about to appear, to set in train the events leading to Pelleas's humiliation, madness, mutiny and death.

It is easy enough to see why the wilderness lacks good places. *The* good place is Camelot, and only Camelot; to leave Camelot is to forsake the human good place and run into the bad place of nightmare. *Balin and Balan* illustrates this pointedly. The garden in which Balin, an unlucky eavesdropper, discovers the truth about Lancelot and Guinevere, is another model of the *locus amoenus*:

> A walk of roses ran from door to door;
> A walk of lilies crost it to the bower;   (*BB* 237-8)

The symmetry, the symbolic dialogue of rose and lily, might be recognized and approved by any romancer. From this, Balin flees to the forest, to Pellam's castle, so consumed with rage that he does not see

> on his right a cavern-chasm
> Yawn over darkness, where, nor far within,
> The whole day died, but, dying, gleamed on rocks
> Roof-pendent, sharp; and others from the floor,
> Tusklike arising, made that mouth of night
> Wherout the Demon issued up from Hell.   (*BB* 307-12)

The contrast of *locus amoenus* and *locus malus* is pointed in the
rival symmetries - the crossing walks of rose and lily, the
opposed "tusks" of rock in the roof and floor of the cave. Behind
the topothesia lurks a narrative theme: Balin, unintentionally
eavesdropping in the garden, hears something he does not want to
hear - and then, in his journey into the wild, passes, without
noting it, the semblance of an evil *mouth*. It is of no poetic con-
sequence that this cave is nameless; the description itself is a
name for a notion (gossip, slander, the wicked tongue) that informs
much of the poem.

   The ultimate Good Place is "the island-valley of Avilion" -

> Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,
> Nor ever wind blows loudly; but it lies
> Deep-meadowed, happy, fair with orchard lawn
> And bowery hollows crowned with summer sea . . .
>   (*PA* 427-31)

But this is outside the realm of the *Idylls*. To reach it, Arthur
must fight one more battle. The "twelve great battles" fought to
make the realm are named by Tennyson, in *Lancelot and Elaine* (284-
305).[10] The last battle, however, the long fight in the mist, is
nameless; it takes place on the last day of the year, in some
unspecified place. We may compare this haunted uncertainty with
the businesslike realism of Malory, who describes the battle as
taking place "uppon a downe bysyde Salysbyry and nat farre from the
seesyde", on "the Monday aftir Trynyte Sunday".[11] In Tennyson's
narrative the blind mist and the dying year have a significance that
transcends the realism of locations and dates. Similarly, it is
symbolic topothesia, not realistic topography, that motivates the
description of the place where Arthur is carried by Bedivere:

> a chapel nigh the field,
> A broken chancel with a broken cross,
> That stood on a dark strait of barren land:
> On one side lay the Ocean, and on one
> Lay a great water, and the moon was full.   (*PA* 177-80)

The symbolic purport of the place is marked for the reader by the
words *the moon was full* - one of the *Leitmotif* phrases of the
Idylls, connecting this passage with the description of the Grail
castle, Carbonek:[12]

> A castle like a rock upon a rock,
> With chasm-like portals open to the sea,
> And steps that met the breaker! there was none

> Stood near it but a lion on each side
> That kept the entry, and the moon was full.   (*HG* 811-15)

The passages mark theme and counter-theme: a *castle like a rock upon a rock* and *a broken chancel with a broken cross*. They each have verbal and figurative connections with *The Coming of Arthur*; the extract from *The Passing of Arthur*, in particular, recalls the settings and imagery of Arthur's personal myth – the mysterious coming of the child from the sea, in "the night of the new year", the dragon ship that brings him, the sword that comes from the enchanted mere (the "great water") and must be returned to it. Arthur has come full circle; the place where this happens is not a map-location, not a real place, with such a name as might "cleave to cairn or cromlech", but a terminus in a mythical, psychological, iconographic journey.

<p align="center">*   *   *   *   *</p>

There is no part of speech more limited and concrete in reference than the proper noun. A name exclusively denotes, and in doing so excludes the mysteries and multiplicities of association; as Malory well knew, there is nothing so effective as a personal name or a place-name if one's wish is to promote the illusion of a factual chronicle. For this reason, the proper noun is *per se* antipoetic, or at least poetically neutral. Names, however, can be *poeticized*, through their inclusion in phonaesthetic patterns, their incorporation in the rhetoric of lists, or by endowing them with connotations which will irradiate any context in which they occur. In each of these arts, Tennyson is adept. His clear purpose in *Idylls of the King*, however, is to escape from name into image into symbol into myth – into that state in which names cease to typify the landscape, and the landscape itself typifies a realm of feeling. That is why the topography of these poems is not a gazetteer topography, as Malory's sometimes affects to be. With Tennyson, topothesia is a game of symbols; and the terrain of his *Idylls* might be described in the words of a character in the *Mabinogion*, who says to Geraint, son of Erbin:

> Down below there is a hedge of mist, and within it
> there are enchanted games, and every man that has gone
> thither has never come back.[14]

This is a warning to literary critics; linguists have passport rights; and onomasticians, of course, may come and go as they please.

[1]   All references to the *Idylls* are cited from the text printed in *The Poems of Tennyson*, ed. Christopher Ricks (London, 1969). Abbreviations: CA = *The Coming of Arthur*; GL = *Gareth and Lynette*; HG = *The Holy Grail*; BB = *Balin and Balan*; PE = *Pelleas and Etarre*; LT = *The Last Tournament*; PA = *The Passing of Arthur*.

[2]   All references to Malory are cited from *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, ed. Eugene Vinaver, 3 vols. (2nd ed., Oxford, 1967).

[3]   Ed.cit., pp.1333-4.

[4]   Hallam Tennyson, *Alfred Lord Tennyson: a Memoir*, 2 vols. (London, 1897) II, p.126.

[5]   On topothesia and kindred themes see E.R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask (London, 1953) ch.10, "The Ideal Landscape".

[6]   J.M. Gray, *Serialism in the Idylls: Lists* (Lincoln, 1974) pp.8-9.

[7]   R.B. Martin, *Tennyson: The Unquiet Heart* (Oxford, 1980) pp.473-4.

[8]   See Hallam, Lord Tennyson, *Materials for a Life of Alfred Tennyson* (privately printed, no date) IV, p.461: "The following is the Italian novella on which *The Lady of Shalott* was founded: Novella LXXXI *Qui conta come la Damigella di Scalot morì per amore di Lancialotto de Lac*. From the *Cento Novelle Antiche* dated conjecturally before 1321. Text from the Milan edn, ed. G. Ferrano, 1804".

[9]   Valerie Pitt, *Tennyson Laureate* (London, 1962) p.46.

[10] Tennyson took the names of the battles from Nennius, but remodelled the list a little, after his own poetic fashion. See J.M. Gray, *Thro' the Vision of the Night. A Study of Source, Evolution and Structure in Tennyson's Idylls of the King* (Edinburgh, 1980) pp.48-51.

[11] On Tennyson's re-working of Malory in the account of the last battle, see W. Nash, "Tennyson: 'The Epic' and the Old 'Morte'", *The Cambridge Quarterly* 6 (1975) pp.326-49.

[12] The phrase *the moon was full* is adapted from Malory's "and the moone shone ryght clere". This is in the description of the Grail Castle; no such phrase occurs in Malory's account of the last battle.

[13] See the epilogue poem, "To the Queen", in *The Poems of Tennyson*, ed.cit., pp.1755-6, lines 35-41.

[14] Quoted from *The Mabinogion*, trans. Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones (London, 1949; repr. 1970) p.270. Tennyson made considerable use of the *Mabinogion*, in Lady Charlotte Guest's annotated translation (1849).

"New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-Altered Landscape" was an exhibition that epitomized a key moment in American landscape photography. The show was curated by William Jenkins at the International Museum of Photography at the George Eastman House (Rochester, New York), and remained open to the public from October 1975 until February 1976. The exhibition had a ripple effect on the whole medium and genre, not only in the United States, but in Europe too where generations of landscape photographers Niebylski. Nasr. Tennysonian Topography in Leeds Studies in English. H.A.A. Basic Books. 1968. London. Seyyed Hossein Nasr. 1976 . Nicholson.H. Hamden. Contemporary Linguistics. pp55-69. W. 1927..