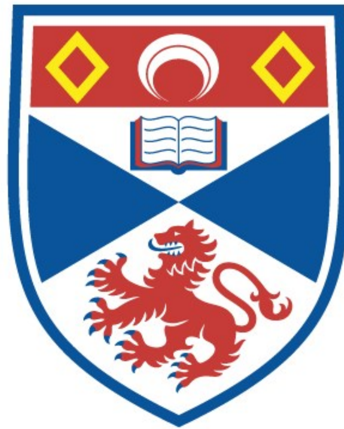
The wicked and the divine: the influence of Alfred Tennyson's Vivien on literature and art, 1859-1951

Alexander James Michael Erickson

A thesis submitted for the degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews



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Abstract

This thesis examines the legacy of Alfred Tennyson's Vivien, the wicked enchantress of the *Idylls of the King* (1859), in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Anglo-American Arthurian literature and art. Chapter 1 details Tennyson's lifelong development of Vivien and her transformation in the poet's imagination from a static female evil to a dynamic feminine creative principle. Chapter 2 surveys the influence of Tennyson's Vivien on British and American literature and art between 1859 and 1900 and covers the imitative Arthurian poetry produced in the decade after the *Idylls* first appeared, the satirical responses to the character of the 1870s and 1880s, W. B. Yeats's first play *Vivien and Time* (1882), and Vivien's poetic glorification at the end of the nineteenth century. Turning to the twentieth century, Chapter 3 begins with a survey of Vivien's various adaptations in children's Arthuriana and discusses how the character became a didactic tool for impressionable young readers. Vivien is then examined in the context of Arthurian drama, which was part of a wider Anglo-American dramatic revival that occurred around the turn of the century. The chapter's final section considers Vivien's presence in the Modernist poetry of Wilfrid Scawen Blunt and Edwin Arlington Robinson, both of whom were significantly affected by the First World War and identified within Vivien a transcendent, and hopeful, feminine essence. Chapter 4 examines the work of the occultist Dion Fortune and the prolific writer and philosopher John Cowper Powys. Vivien le Fay Morgan stars in Fortune's two novels—*The Sea Priestess* (1938) and *Moon Magic* (1956)—as a magical adept, a priestess of the goddess Isis, and a universal symbol of feminine enlightenment. In Powys's sweeping novel *Porius*, the sorceress Nineue is depicted as "Tennyson's Vivien", a clever and fatal woman who also has the potential to bring about a new Golden Age of humanity.

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Abbreviations

BB	Alfred Tennyson, *Balin and Balan*, in *The Poems of Tennyson*, ed. Christopher Ricks (1987).
CA	Alfred Tennyson, *The Coming of Arthur*, in *The Poems of Tennyson*, ed. Christopher Ricks (1987).
PA	Alfred Tennyson, *The Passing of Arthur*, in *The Poems of Tennyson*, ed. Christopher Ricks (1987).
MG	Alfred Tennyson, *Merlin and the Gleam*, in *The Poems of Tennyson*, ed. Christopher Ricks (1987).
MM	Dion Fortune, *Moon Magic* (York Beach: Red Wheel/Weiser, 2003).
MV	Alfred Tennyson, *Merlin and Vivien*, in *The Poems of Tennyson*, ed. Christopher Ricks (1987).
Memoir	Hallam Tennyson, *Alfred Lord Tennyson: A Memoir by His Son*, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1897).
Poems	*The Poems of Tennyson*, ed. Christopher Ricks, 2nd ed., 3 vols. (Longman House, Burnt Mill, Harlow: Longman, 1987).
Porius	John Cowper Powys, *Porius: A Novel*, ed. Judith Bond and Morine Krissdóttir (New York: Overlook Duckworth, 2007).
SP	Dion Fortune, *The Sea Priestess* (York Beach: Red Wheel/Weiser, 2003).

Introduction

In August 1871, the Scottish writer Robert Williams Buchanan launched a ruthless attack on what he dubbed the "Fleshly School of Poetry". Williams Buchanan vehemently criticised the Pre-Raphaelites—particularly Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Morris, and the collective's associate Algernon Charles Swinburne—for producing a body of poetry that seemingly extolled sensualism and aestheticism at the cost of moral propriety. Moreover, he considered the Fleshly School to be one of many such literary and artistic movements which, despite attempts to make a name for itself, was merely an ostentatious reverberation of the era's preeminent poetical voice—the Poet Laureate, Alfred Tennyson. As Williams Buchanan wrote:

> it is scarcely possible to discuss with any seriousness the pretensions with which foolish friends and small critics have surrounded the fleshly school, which, in spite of its spasmodic ramifications in the erotic direction, is merely one of the many sub-Tennysonian schools expanded to supernatural dimensions, and endeavouring by affectations all its own to overshadow its connection with the great original.[1]

Adding further fuel to his fire of disparagement, Williams Buchanan insinuated that all the artistic efforts of the Fleshly School had already been summed up in Tennyson's notorious tale of seduction from the *Idylls of the King*—"the weird and doubtful 'Vivien'". Williams Buchanan argued that "in the sweep of one single poem . . . Mr. Tennyson has concentrated all the epicene force which, wearisomely expanded, constitutes the characteristic of the [Fleshly School]. . . . in "Vivien" he has indicated for them the bounds of sensualism in art".[2] This acerbic assault on the Fleshly School brought no shortage of equally impassioned rejoinders, including one from Rossetti, but it was Swinburne who provided the most

[1] Robert Williams Buchanan, "The Fleshly School of Poetry: Mr. D. G. Rossetti," *Contemporary Review* 18 (August 1871): 335.
[2] Ibid., 335.

vehement reply, particularly concerning the suggestion that Tennyson's devious Arthurian enchantress existed as a pinnacle of artistic achievement.[3] Swinburne embarked on his own invective against her character in *Under the Microscope* (1872), leaving no room for misinterpretation:

> The Vivien of Mr. Tennyson's idyl seems to me, to speak frankly, about the most base and repulsive person ever set forth in serious literature. Her impurity is actually eclipsed by her incredible and incomparable vulgarity . . . . She is such a sordid creature as plucks men passing by the sleeve. . . . it is the utterly ignoble quality of Vivien which makes her so unspeakably repulsive and unfit for artistic treatment. . . . she is simply a subject for the police-court.[4]

Swinburne's sharp retort effectively put the short-lived quarrel between Williams Buchanan and the Fleshly School to rest. It did not, however, resign Tennyson's Vivien to the fringes of literary history, and instead enshrined her as one of the most infamous figures of nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature and art.

Occurring twelve years after Tennyson first introduced his Vivien to the public in 1859, the heated dispute between Williams Buchanan and Swinburne illustrates the enduring and immensely polarising reputation that the character garnered in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As the "evil genius" of Tennyson's Round Table, Vivien's overarching plot to ruin Camelot through discord and seduction sat uneasily with many Victorian readers, and her devious behaviour has continued to elicit critical responses in the present day.[5] While Tennyson's Vivien has enjoyed steady critical attention since her first appearance, much of her century-and-a-half-long body of criticism has seemingly taken the poet's declaration of his enchantress as the principal antagonist of his Camelot at face value and treated Vivien as a largely one-dimensional feminine evil unworthy of extensive investigation. Additionally,

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[3] For Rossetti's reply to Williams Buchanan see "The Stealthy School of Criticism," *Athenaeum* 2303 (16 December 1871): 792-794.

[4] Algernon Charles Swinburne, *Under the Microscope* (Portland, Maine: Thomas B. Mosher, 1899), 40-41.

[5] Hallam Tennyson quoted in *The Poems of Tennyson*, by Alfred Tennyson, ed. Christopher Ricks, 2nd ed. (Longman House, Burnt Mill, Harlow: Longman, 1987), 3:805; *The Poems of Tennyson* hereafter cited as *Poems*.

echoing Swinburne's implication of her as a streetwalker fit only for a prison cell, there has been an overwhelming tendency to read Tennyson's Vivien from the restricting perspectives of the social, spiritual, and moral troubles that many Victorians perceived were corrupting their own era. While these Victorian-centric discussions helpfully uncover the nineteenth-century immediacy of Tennyson's Vivien, the dominance of such historicist approaches has resulted in a lack of interrogation of the broader creative legacy of her character on subsequent Arthurian literature and art. The present study fills this void by examining the influence of Tennyson's Vivien on Arthurian literature and art in the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth. In evaluating the influence of Tennyson's Vivien on Arthurian literature and art this study has three specific aims: firstly, to reconsider Tennyson's shifting perceptions of Vivien's character in light of his lifelong obsessions with the Arthurian legend and "fatal women"; secondly, to gauge the different kinds and degrees of influence that Tennyson's Vivien left on nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature and art; and lastly, to demonstrate the broader literary-artistic "evolution" of Tennyson's Vivien from a worldly evil into a universalised expression of divine femininity.

While Tennyson's wily Vivien can be considered the modern "archetype" of the character and the iteration which has dominated the Anglo-American imagination for over one-hundred and sixty years, the history of the character widely known today as "Vivien" is long, convoluted, and exceptionally ambiguous.[6] Since her first unnamed appearance in Chrétien de Troyes's twelfth-century Arthurian romance, *Lancelot, the Knight of the Cart* (*Le Chevalier de la Charrette*), Vivien has been alternatively depicted as a beneficent and a malevolent sorceress, a mystical fairy and a minor water spirit, a priestess and a demon, a

[6] To maintain consistency, I use Tennyson's spelling of "Vivien" when speaking generally about the character. Distinctions will be made where appropriate.

mother and a whore. Often a major player in the stories of Merlin, she is variously presented as the wizard's lover, student, jailer, and destroyer. Likewise, she is sometimes King Arthur's distinguished counsellor and friend, and at other times his cold-blooded nemesis. Vivien's diverse characterisation is further accentuated by a nomenclature that includes over twenty different names and titles, of which many are used interchangeably in a given text.[7] Yet, of all her associations, Vivien, or Nimüe as she is otherwise commonly called, is most frequently—though not always—conflated with the mysterious entity known as the Lady of the Lake.

Broadly speaking, Vivien's origins in Arthurian literature can be traced to the initial appearances of the Lady of the Lake in the medieval stories of Lancelot. The Lady is first mentioned in passing in Chrétien's *Lancelot* (c. 1175-1181) as the maternalistic "fairy" who "had cared for him [Lancelot] in his infancy" and provided the knight with a magic ring that "had the power to break any spell".[8] While the fairy is never mentioned again in Chrétien's tale, her affiliation with water, and more specifically a lake, comes indirectly by way of the story's hero who, while anonymous for the first half of the narrative, is later identified as Lancelot *of the Lake*.[9] Despite her brief initial appearance, Anne Berthelot suggests that Chrétien's fairy was evidently popular enough with medieval readers to inspire a new generation of Arthurian literature that would give greater prominence to the character later dubbed the "Lady of the Lake".[10] Recognised as the first account of the Lancelot story in German, Ulrich von Zatzikhoven's *Lanzelet*, composed roughly twenty years after Chrétien's

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[7] For the debate on Vivien's etymology see William A. Nitze, "An Arthurian Crux: Viviane or Niniane?," *Romance Philology* 7, no. 4 (1 May 1954): 326-330; Eric P. Hamp, "Viviane or Niniane?—A Comment from the Celtic Side," *Romance Philology* 8, no. 2 (November 1954), 91; A. O. Jarman, "A Note on the Possible Welsh Derivation of Viviane" in *Gallica: Essays Presented to J. Heywood Thomas* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1969), 1-12.
[8] Chrétien de Troyes, *The Knight of the Cart* in *Arthurian Romances*, trans. William W. Kibler and Carleton W. Carroll (London: Penguin, 2004), 236.
[9] Ibid., 252.
[10] Anne Berthelot, "From Niniane to Nimüe: Demonizing the Lady of the Lake" in *Arthurian Women: Essays in Memory of Maureen Fries*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler and Fiona Tolhurst (Dallas: Scriptorum Press, 2001), 89.

Lancelot, also includes the earliest known exposition of the knight's childhood under the Lady's guardianship. In Ulrich's story, an infant Lancelot is rescued from an attack on his royal home by a water fairy and brought to a paradisal land inhabited by fair maidens where he is raised by "a wise mermaid who was a queen".[11] Under the mermaid queen's tutelage, the boy receives a comprehensive courtly education; he learns how to talk to ladies, how to play musical instruments, and, at the instruction of mermen, how to defend himself in armed combat. When at last Lancelot decides to depart and make a name for himself, the mermaid queen, acting as his own conscience, implores him "to treat all the world with great regard, to be steadfast, and always to endeavor to do the best he could."[12] There is no definitive evidence which suggests that Ulrich's mermaid is an extension of Chretien's water fairy, and so despite a shared aquatic association, they appear to be coincidental developments of character.

Following Ulrich's *Lanzelet*, the Lady would next appear some twenty years later in the Prose *Lancelot*. Making up the core of the thirteenth-century French Arthurian literary cycle known as the *Vulgate Cycle* (c. 1210-1235), the Prose *Lancelot* (or *Vulgate Lancelot*) was derived from an earlier independent text known as the non-cyclic Prose *Lancelot* and draws from the work of Chrétien. While the *Vulgate Lancelot* mirrors *Lanzelet* in expounding upon Lancelot's childhood under the watch of the Lady of the Lake, it is the first text to give the Lady a name and a background: she is a young woman from Brittany called Niniene in the non-cyclic *Lancelot*, and later Nymenche or Ninianne in the *Vulgate Lancelot*. While of mortal birth, Ninianne is a young "fairy" who resides in an otherworldly realm of enchantment, the entrance to which is disguised as a lake; it is thus in the *Vulgate Lancelot* that Ninianne is first explicitly named the "Lady of the Lake".[13] In a departure from *Lanzelet*,

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[11] Ulrich von Zatzikhoven, *Lanzelet*, trans. Thomas Kerth (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 29.
[12] Ibid., 32.
[13] *Lancelot-Grail*, ed. Norris J. Lacy, vol. 3, *Lancelot: Parts I and II*, trans. Samuel N. Rosenberg and Carleton W. Carroll (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2010), 33.

Ninianne does not rescue but abducts Lancelot from his mother, Elaine, following the death of his father, King Ban. She takes the infant back to her mystical realm and instructs him in the ways of chivalry as well as provides him with many magical gifts including the magical ring first described by Chrétien. Throughout the *Vulgate* narrative, Ninianne intervenes in Lancelot's quests, often aiding him directly by way of the ladies and messengers who serve her. Like Ulrich's mermaid queen, Ninianne is an unreservedly benevolent being, with Carolyne Larrington describing her as "an unmitigated force for good" despite a penchant for acting "ruthlessly in pursuit of her larger goals"—the most notable of which is uniting Lancelot with Guinevere.[14]

The *Vulgate Lancelot* is also the site of the Lady of the Lake's first engagements with her most famous affiliate, Merlin. While the story of Merlin and Vivien is largely remembered today from the Tennysonian perspective of Vivien's scandalous seduction of the wizard, in the *Vulgate Lancelot* it is Merlin who falls in love with Ninianne and lustfully follows her wherever she goes. However, as the story tells:

> [Ninianne] was very sensible and refined, and she held him off. One day, though, the girl encouraged him to tell her who he was, and he told her the truth. She answered that she would do whatever he wished, if only he taught her some of his great craft. And he, loving her as much as any mortal man could love, agreed to teach her anything her lips requested.[15]

Of all Merlin's tricks, Ninianne desires most to learn how to put someone asleep forever. He acquiesces, and she uses the spell on him whenever he comes to her to protect her virginity. Every time Merlin wakes, he believes that he has slept with Ninianne, and so the routine continues for an extended period. Having learned as much as she wanted from Merlin, Ninianne finally seals the wizard in a pit in the perilous forest of Darnantes never to be seen or heard from again. The episode between Ninianne and Merlin in the *Vulgate Lancelot* is

[14] Carolyne Larrington, *King Arthur's Enchantresses: Morgan and Her Sisters in Arthurian Tradition* (London: I. B. Tauris and Co. Ltd., 2006), 101.
[15] *Lancelot-Grail*, 3:21.

brief, yet it marks the first instance of what would become one of the most reproduced Vivien narratives—generally referred to as the "entrapment" narrative—in Arthurian literature and art.

The story of Ninianne and Merlin is significantly developed in the *Vulgate Estoire de Merlin* and the *Post-Vulgate Suite de Merlin*. While narratively situated before *Lancelot* in the *Vulgate Cycle*, the *Estoire* was composed sometime later and serves as an adaptation of Robert de Boron's partly lost French epic poem, *Merlin*, written around the turn of the thirteenth century. Unlike the *Vulgate Lancelot*, when Merlin first meets the newly-named Viviane in the *Estoire*, he is fully aware that his fate rests in her hands. Under the guise of a youthful noble, Merlin travels to the Forest of Briosque (Brocéliande) and discovers the twelve-year-old Viviane near a fountain. The only major medieval text not to associate her with the Lady of the Lake, the *Estoire* frames Viviane as the daughter of a high-ranking vavasor named Dyonas, whose godmother was none other than Diana, the Hellenic-Roman "goddess of the wood".[16] Aiming to demonstrate his magical prowess, Merlin conjures up a magnificent castle populated by ghostly merrymakers and a beautiful fragrant orchard, much to Viviane's amusement. Not only is she impressed, but she wishes to learn such tricks, and so swears to Merlin that in exchange for his knowledge she will "be your lady love and your friend forever, without any wrongdoing or baseness, for as long as I live." In response, the phantom partygoers sing out in unison: "Truly, love begins in happiness and ends in grief!"[17] Merlin ignores the ill omen, but Viviane takes it to heart. As in the *Vulgate Lancelot*, Viviane initially uses her magical skills to protect her chastity from Merlin, whom she becomes suspicious of upon discovering his demonic origins.[18] When the two finally become lovers, Viviane determines to keep Merlin as hers forever and implores the wizard to teach her how

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[16] *Lancelot-Grail*, ed. Norris J. Lacy, vol. 2, *The Story of Merlin*, trans. Rupert T. Pickens (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2010), 224; Larrington, *Enchantresses*, 105.
[17] *Lancelot-Grail*, 2:226.
[18] Ibid., 2:301.

to magically "imprison" a man.[19] Completely enamoured and fully aware that he is her intended prisoner, Merlin shows her the spell. Sometime later in Brocéliande, having fallen asleep in Viviane's lap, Merlin wakes to find himself trapped in a beautiful tower of magic. Though he will remain imprisoned for ever, Viviane promises to visit him often, coming and going as she pleases.

After the *Vulgate Estoire*, the *Post-Vulgate Suite de Merlin* (c. 1230-1240), known commonly as the *Suite*, represents the first significant departure in the story of the Lady of the Lake from Robert's source material. It is important to note that the *Suite* was one of the primary sources for Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*, which in turn provided the principal source material for Tennyson's *Idylls*. The Lady's narrative in the *Suite* begins with a stag barging into the great hall of Arthur's court followed closely behind by a hound in pursuit. The commotion is forced outside, and a young lady soon enters the hall astride a palfrey and dressed in the garb of a huntress. Frustrated by the loss of her quarry, the huntress (*damoiselle cacheresse*) rebukes Arthur and his household for interrupting her hunt and chasing away her beloved dog. While Arthur and Merlin discuss the huntress's compensation, another knight on a white horse suddenly enters the hall and abducts her. The huntress is eventually rescued by King Pellinor and returned to Arthur's court where she is discovered to be Ninianne, the daughter of the King of Northumberland in Brittany and the very Lady of the Lake who raised Lancelot in Robert's poem.[20] Merlin immediately falls in love with the fifteen-year-old Ninianne, though, echoing previous narratives, she fears he may enchant her and take her virginity. Unlike prior characterisations, the Merlin of the *Suite* has no lecherous intent towards Ninianne and only hopes "to know her carnally of her own volition".[21] Despite the wizard's good intentions, and in a further divergence of

[19] Ibid., 2:482.
[20] *Lancelot-Grail*, ed. Norris J. Lacy, vol. 8, *The Post-Vulgate Cycle: The Merlin Continuation*, trans. Martha Asher (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2010), 156.
[21] Ibid., 8:159.

characterisation, it is revealed that the Lady "hated nothing else so much as she hated him", though she allows him to accompany her so long as he promises to teach her all the magic she demands. Differing from the *Estoire*'s Viviane, the Ninianne of the *Suite* makes no return promises to Merlin. Summoned by her father, Ninianne sets out with Merlin to her home in Brittany. Along the way they meet Queen Elaine who introduces them to her young son and Ninianne's future ward, Lancelot. Developing Viviane's association with the goddess of the hunt first invoked in the *Estoire*, Merlin offers to take Ninianne to the Lake of Diana, much to her enthusiasm: "Anything of Diana's would please me, and I would gladly see it, for all her life she loved the pleasures of the forest as much as I do or more," she says.[22] At the lake, Merlin recounts the tale of the goddess's violent betrayal of her lover, Faunus. After two years, Diana fell in love with another knight of lower lineage named Felix and, fearing Faunus's retribution on her new lover, she decided to kill Faunus herself "by poison or something else."[23] In the end, Diana lured an injured Faunus into an enchanted tomb and having emptied the vessel of its healing waters, she sealed the wounded knight within and filled the hollow with boiling lead. Horrified by her wickedness, Felix decapitated Diana and threw her body into the lake now bearing her name. Seemingly unphased by Merlin's tale, Ninianne charges the wizard to rebuild the home belonging to Diana that was destroyed by Faunus's vengeful father. Merlin does not summon a magic manor but seeks out masons and carpenters to build the house by the lakeside. While the two live cordially for a time, Merlin, invoking the story of Faunus's murder, reveals to Ninianne—whom he now refers to as "My Lady of the Lake"—that he has foreseen his death in the near future, "either by poison or some other way." He further discloses that he has no means of protecting himself, at which news "the maiden was glad, for she longed for nothing so much as Merlin's death".[24]

[22] Ibid., 8:161.
[23] Ibid., 8:162.
[24] Ibid., 8:164-165.

While the Lady plots the wizard's final demise, the pair return to Britain upon Merlin's clairvoyant discovery that Morgan le Fay has stolen Excalibur from Arthur and given the sword to Sir Accolon to unwittingly slay the King in battle. While proceeding through the Perilous Forest on their way to Logres, Ninianne and Merlin encounter two enchanters who bewitch travellers with harps. Merlin bests the sorcerers, lays them in ditches, and, further foreshadowing his own demise, buries them beneath flaming sulphur and stone slabs. Further into the forest the pair happen upon a valley of stone. Hoping to become more intimate with Ninianne, Merlin invites her to explore "the loveliest little room" carved into the rock nearby and sealed with doors of iron "so strong that [no one] inside would ever get out."[25] He further relates that the room was home to two sweethearts who were unrivalled in love and who are now buried deeper within the chamber. Sensing the moment to rid herself of the wizard has arrived, Ninianne gleefully follows Merlin inside, enchants him into a deep sleep, has him thrown into the lovers' tomb with the aid of two pages, and magically seals the sarcophagus so that it can never be opened by anyone but herself. Ninianne's story does not end here, and in an instant, she transforms from a murderer into a saviour. Immediately after her disposal of Merlin, she goes to intercede in the battle between Arthur and Accolon. Just as the King is about to suffer Accolon's killing blow, the Lady of the Lake enchants the knight, forcing him to drop Excalibur. Thereafter, Arthur retrieves his sword, Accolon realises he has been duped by Morgan, and the Lady reassures the King of her support for his chivalric ways before vanishing from the story for good, save a couple of minor interventions involving servants acting as her proxies.

The next text to feature the Lady of the Lake, the *Livre d'Artus*, has been a source of some confusion for scholars. Written sometime after 1230, the story, which survives incompletely, has been alternatively identified as a contemporaneous addition to the *Post-*

[25] Ibid., 8:187.

Vulgate Suite, as a continuation of the *Vulgate Estoire*, and as a third, entirely separate sequel to Robert's *Merlin*.[26] To further complicate matters, Carolyne Larrington notes that the *Livre*'s story of Niniane and Merlin contains echoes of both the *Estoire* and the *Suite*.[27] In the *Livre*, Merlin first meets Niniane in the forest of Broceliande as he does in the *Estoire*. The wizard is subsequently portrayed as the righteous lover of the *Suite* who vows never to shame Niniane, yet she continues to enchant him, as she does in previous narratives, out of fear for her own purity.[28] In a divergence from narrative tradition, Niniane acquires Merlin's magic not only for herself but also for her cousin Lunete. A key figure in Chretien's *Yvain* (c. 1180) and the analogous *Lady of the Fountain* from the Welsh *Mabinogion* (c. 1050-1225), Lunete is in the *Livre* purported to be the source of the enchanted fountain whereat water is poured on a nearby stone which summons a knight whom the challenger must fight. Lunete's own cousin Brandus becomes Niniane's lover, whom Niniane attempts but fails to conceal from Merlin. When the wizard begins an affair with the salacious Morgan, Niniane tries and ultimately succeeds to win him back. At this point in the *Livre* Niniane vanishes, though there is enough evidence in the partial text to suggest that it is through her that Merlin will eventually "meet his end".[29]

Only recently discovered in 2019, the thirteenth-century French manuscript known as the *Bristol Merlin* sheds new light on Vivien's medieval intertextual development. The brief episode between the two lovers takes place near the end of the incomplete manuscript. Picking up from the moment Merlin first returns to Viviane in the *Vulgate Estoire*, the wizard

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[26] Carol Dover, *A Companion to the Lancelot-Grail Cycle* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2003), x; Fanni Bogdanow and Richard Trachsler, "Rewriting Prose Romance: The Post-Vulgate *Roman du Graal* and Related Texts" in *The Arthur of the French: The Arthurian Legend in Medieval French and Occitan Literature*, ed. Glyn S. Burgess and Karen Pratt (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2006), 357; Helen J. Nicholson, *Love, War, and the Grail: Templars, Hospitallers and Teutonic Knights in Medieval Epic and Romance* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 22.
[27] Larrington, *Enchantresses*, 109.
[28] *The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances*, ed. H. Oskar Sommer, vol. 7, *Supplement: Le Livre d'Artus* (Washington: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1913), 124-127.
[29] Ibid., 272; Larrington's translation, *Enchantresses*, 110.

and a young woman described only as his "sweetheart" embark on a love affair which she aims to keep secret from her parents. Like the Merlin of the *Post-Vulgate Suite*, the *Bristol* Merlin bears no ill will towards his paramour, never asking her "to do anything that would bring her shame."[30] Once again, however, Merlin's sweetheart protects herself from his advances and out of fear of his demonic lineage. Recognising her power over him, she convinces him to teach her a sleeping spell that she can work on her parents because, she tells him, "you should know that I would be dead if they had any idea what we were doing."[31] Though Merlin knows she will use the magic he shows her on himself, he further teaches her three names which—evoking Chrétien's *Lancelot*—she inscribes on a magic ring and recites whenever she wants to prevent him from speaking. There is no indication of what is to become of Merlin, and the account closes as he leaves to meet Arthur in Benoic.

The last significant French medieval source of the story of the Lady of the Lake is the *Prophesies de Merlin* (c. 1276). Despite significant departures from its source material, the *Prophesises*, like the *Bristol Merlin*, draws broadly from a host of previous texts including the *Vulgate Lancelot*, the *Post-Vulgate Suite*, and the *Livre d'Artus*. While the Lady's entrapment of Merlin most closely follows the *Suite*'s narrative, the wizard's spirit continues to prophesise from the confines of his tomb using Méliadus—the Lady's lover and sibling of Tristan—as his mouthpiece. Paralleling the various tales of Lancelot, Méliadus was abandoned by his mother, the Queen of Scotland, and rescued and reared by the Lady's own mother. As Larrington notes, many of the previous dealings between the Lady and Merlin "are taken for granted in the *Prophesies*; she has already learned all the magic she needs from him, and has no intention of giving him her love or sleeping with him."[32] The relationship between the Lady and Merlin in the *Prophesies* essentially mirrors that of the *Suite*: "This

[30] Original text and translation included in *The Bristol Merlin: Revealing the Secrets of a Medieval Fragment*, by Leah Tether, Laura Chuhan Campbell, and Benjamin Pohl (Leeds: Arc Humanities Press, 2021): 113.
[31] Ibid., 113.
[32] Larrington, *Enchantresses*, 110.

Merlin loved the Lady of the Lake with all his power and with all his heart, the lady hated him as much or more."[33] Unlike the *Suite*, however, Merlin does not suspect his demise at the Lady's hands and believes that only a "white serpent" will be his doom.[34] Merlin does not associate the Lady with the white serpent because he is under the misapprehension that he has already taken her virginity, and thus the "whiteness" of her purity. While the two abide for a time together, following the *Livre*, Morgan eventually comes in search for Merlin. Fearing that he will align himself with Morgan and her associate Claudus, who is a threat to her charge, Lancelot, the Lady resolves to do away with Merlin altogether. She then leads him to a cave which houses a tomb. Unlike the *Suite*, the tomb does not contain the remains of two lovers, yet the theme is played out when the Lady tricks Merlin into testing out the grave's capacity to hold the both of them. Once he is inside, the Lady seals the tomb and declares herself the white serpent of his prophecies. The Lady first justifies her actions to Merlin by claiming that she only seeks to restore her reputation of purity, which has been severely damaged by Morgan's deeming her a "whore".[35] Later on, however, the Lady regrets the way she treated Merlin and acknowledges that she has "done something very treacherous . . . of which I greatly repent."[36] In the end, Merlin renounces his love for the Lady and she goes off to live with Méliadus, despite his affiliation with the wizard's prophesying spirit.

No medieval source was more influential on the development of Tennyson's Vivien than Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*. First published by William Caxton in 1485, Malory's text exists as a culmination of medieval Arthurian tradition, with his sources ranging from the French *Vulgate* and *Post-Vulgate* cycles to the Middle English Alliterative

[33] *Les Prophesies de Merlin*, ed. Anne Berthelot (Cologny-Genève: Fondation Martin Bodmer, 1992), 92; Larrington's translation, *Enchantresses*, 110.
[34] *Prophesies*, 95.
[35] Ibid., 95.
[36] *Les Prophecies de Merlin*, ed. Lucy Allen Paton, vol. 1 (New York: D. C. Heath and Company, 1926), 224; Larrington's translation, *Enchantresses*, 112.

Morte Arthure and Stanzaic *Morte Arthur*.[37] With respect to his narrative of the Lady of the Lake, Malory primarily follows the account of the *Post-Vulgate Suite*. Not one but several Ladies and Damsels of the Lake appear in the *Morte*. The first Lady of the Lake to be identified brings Excalibur to Arthur.[38] Mirroring the narrative of the *Suite*, this Lady—who goes unnamed in the *Suite*—is subsequently beheaded by Balin. The Lady's title is thereafter passed on to Nynive.[39] Malory's story and characterisation of Nynive exhibit a number of parallels to the Ninianne of the *Suite*: she enters the story as the *damoiselle cacheresse* and is immediately abducted in Arthur's court by a rogue knight; she is then rescued by Pellinore and becomes Merlin's student. Unlike the medieval French and German Arthurian tradition, Nynive does not reside in a lake, nor is she associated with Lancelot. When Malory turns his attention to the episode of Nynive and Merlin, she is reintroduced as "one of the damsels of the Lady of the Laake".[40] Harkening back to the *Vulgate Lancelot*, Malory's Merlin is inconspicuous in his lust for the damsel:

> [He] wolde nat lette her have no reste, but allwayes he wolde be wyth her.
> . . .
> And allwayes he lay aboute to have hir maydynhode, and she was ever passynge wery of hym and fayne wolde have bene delyverde of hym, for she was aferde of hym for cause he was a devyls son, and she cowde not be skyfte of hym by no meane.[41]

Nynive gladly puts up with Merlin's behaviour for as long as it takes her to acquire the knowledge she seeks from him. Yet, in the end, the wizard's fate is predictably sealed:

> And so one a tyme Merlyon ded shew hir in a roche whereas was a grete wondir and wrought by enchauntment that went undir a grete stone. So by hir subtyle worchyng she made Merlyon to go undir that stone to latte hir wete of the mervayles there, but she wrought so there for hym that he come never oute for all the craufte he coude do, and so she departed and leffte Merlyon.[42]

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[37] P. J. C. Field, introduction to *Le Morte Darthur*, by Sir Thomas Malory, ed. P. J. C. Field (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2021), xxii-xxxi.
[38] Sir Thomas Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*, ed. P. J. C. Field (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2021), 50.
[39] Nynive is one of six similar names that are employed across the Caxton and Winchester editions of Malory's text. I use Field's preferred "Nynive" to maintain consistency.
[40] Malory, *Morte Darthur*, 99.
[41] Ibid., 99-100.
[42] Ibid., 100.

Following the *Vulgate* and *Post-Vulgate* traditions, Merlin is never seen again.[43] Nynive, however, assumes the title of "Lady of the Laake" and goes on to play a significant role in many key events: she intervenes in the battle between Accolon and Arthur, punishes the unfaithful Ettard for her betrayal of Sir Pelleas and takes the knight as her own lover, rescues Arthur from the lovestruck sorceress Aunowre, absolves Guinevere of guilt in the incident of the poisoned apple—which the Queen was accused of proffering to Gawain—and finally takes her place on Arthur's barge to Avalon as "the chyff lady of the laake".[44]

Of all the medieval Ladies of the Lake, scholars have frequently determined Malory's Nynive to be the most dynamic yet also the most confusing characterisation. She has been deemed either an insider or an outsider respecting her special position in Camelot.[45] Likewise, she has been considered both a stock medieval heroine and a "luminary" of Arthurian romance.[46] Granted more personal agency and influence over Camelot's dealings than any of her predecessors, Amy S. Kaufman suggests that "there seems to be no more perplexing character in Malory's *Morte Darthur* than Nynyve, the sorceress who is an exception to every rule for women in romance, who slips cunningly out of the categories into which she is placed".[47] Friend and foe, killer and keeper, damsel and Lady, loner and lover, Malory's Nynive is inherently chameleonic, and she actively chooses the role she desires to play as often as she plays the role dictated by romance tradition. And so, she casually fluctuates between the helpless damsel and the powerful sovereign. As Kaufman further suggests, "Malory gives Nynyve the freedom both to be the law and to break it."[48] This is not

[43] Sir Bagdemagus one day happens upon Merlin's tomb and hears the wizard grumble that only Nynive can free him (Malory, *Morte Darthur*, 106).
[44] Ibid., 113, 130-136, 384-385, 803, 928.
[45] Kenneth Hodges, "Swords and Sorceresses: The Chivalry of Malory's Nyneve," *Arthuriana* 12, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 93; Maggie Rebecca Myers, "Hybrid Identity and the *Morte Darthur*'s Lady of the Lake," *JIAS* 8, no. 1 (2020): 147.
[46] Sue Ellen Holbrook, "Nymue, the Chief Lady of the Lake, in Malory's Le Morte Darthur," *Speculum* 53, no. 4 (October 1978): 777.
[47] Amy S. Kaufman, "The Law of the Lake: Malory's Sovereign Lady," *Arthuriana* 17, no. 3 (Fall 2007): 56.
[48] Ibid., 67.

to imply that the Lady of the *Morte* is an inconsistent and unruly character. On the contrary, as Maggie Rebecca Myers argues, "Malory deliberately situates Nynive as a character whose identity is multifaceted, not fractured. She fills a hybrid existence, one that combines categories while resisting them."[49] While Nynive's hybridity of character can be considered from the perspective of the many roles she plays, it is more powerfully demonstrated through her position as Malory's most progressive female character. Her ascension from a damsel into the Lady does not merely symbolise a shift in magical aptitude, but it also symbolises her natural growth from a girl who needs saving into a woman who does the saving. She can therefore be considered as a hybrid of damsel and Lady who represents a totality of womanhood and female experience, and she is the only woman in the *Morte* who is in complete control of her feminine existence from youth to maturity. Considering that such feminine self-determinism was rare before and for centuries after Malory's age, Nynive can be regarded as a woman ahead of her time.

As many scholars have noted, while not a total "Dark Age", there is a noticeable lull in the production of new Arthurian literature between the publications of the *Morte* in 1485 and Tennyson's *Idylls* in 1859. Original characterisations of Vivien during this period are therefore scarce, and she only begins to make a significant reappearance at the turn of the nineteenth century in John Thelwall's *The Fairy of the Lake: A Dramatic Romance in Three Acts* (1801). In Thelwall's drama, the Lady of the Lake is a powerful fairy who acts as the instigator of the marriage of Arthur and Guenevere.[50] A highly theatrical character, Thelwall's Lady resembles Shakespeare's Titania more than she imitates her Arthurian predecessors. Sir Walter Scott brought further attention to the Lady's name by way of his hugely successful poem, *The Lady of the Lake* (1810), though the narrative itself has nothing

[49] Myers, "Hybrid," 147.
[50] John Thelwall, *The Fairy of the Lake: A Dramatic Romance in Three Acts* in *Poems Chiefly Written in Retirement* (Hereford: W. H. Parker, 1801), 1-92; *The Fairy of the Lake* was performed for the first time in 2009 by the Dalhousie University Theatre Department in Nova Scotia, Canada.

to do with Arthurian legend. In 1835, William Wordsworth published *The Egyptian Maid: Or the Romance of the Water Lily*, a poem in which the Egyptian princess Nina, identified as the Lady of the Lake, sails to Arthur's kingdom to marry a Christian knight. Merlin spies the ship from the coast and destroys it, badly injuring the Lady. Many knights try to revive her, but only Galahad proves successful, and he is awarded her hand in marriage. Besides Tennyson, perhaps the most popular nineteenth-century account of Vivien appears in Matthew Arnold's *Tristram and Iseult* (1852). At the end of Arnold's poem, Iseult of Brittany recounts the story of Vivian's seduction of Merlin to her children, alluding to her own fatal deception of Tristram. While previously a subject treated almost exclusively by male authors, the nineteenth century also sees women writers engaging with Vivien for the first time. In the travel book *The Falls, Lakes, and Mountains of North Wales* (1845), Louisa Stuart Costello describes a grotto in Snowdonia as that in which Merlin was confined by "the fairy Viviana, or the White Serpent"—a possible allusion to the *Prophesies*.[51] Of particular note, the novelist Charlotte Mary Yonge, whom Tennyson greatly admired, includes a retelling of Merlin's entrapment in a hawthorn tree by Viviana, the Lady of the Lake, in her children's book, *The History of Sir Thomas Thumb*, published in 1855—just four years before the *Idylls of the King*.

While Vivien was not an entirely alien figure in the nineteenth century, Tennyson's treatment of her marks the pinnacle of her post-medieval revival—and it was in the Laureate's hands that Vivien was elevated from medieval literary relic to a near household name for over half a century. Often considered the most original character in the *Idylls*, Tennyson's Vivien remains grounded in medieval tradition. As the poet's son Hallam records, the principal sources of the *Idylls* include Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* (primarily the

[51] Louisa Stuart Costello, *The Falls, Lakes, and Mountains of North Wales* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1845), 123.

1816 Walker and Edwards edition), Lady Charlotte Guest's translation of the *Mabinogion* (1838-1845), and Tennyson's own imagination.[52] Unlike most of the characters in the *Idylls*, all three of these sources inform Vivien. Hallam notes that "my father created the character of Vivien with much care—as the evil genius of the Round Table—who in her lustfulness of the flesh could not believe in anything either good or great. The story of [*Merlin and Vivien*] . . . is essentially original, and was founded on [Malory]".[53] Regarding Malory's influence, Tennyson may have been inspired by the *Morte*'s entrapment narrative, but, as is discussed below, the details of the story are greatly altered. "For the name of Vivien," Hallam continues, "my father is indebted to the old [*Vulgate*] *Romance of Merlin*".[54] Tennyson's acquaintance with the Viviane of the *Vulgate Estoire* came by way of two indirect sources: Robert Southey's translation of the medieval text in his 1817 edition of Malory, and Lady Guest's note on Brocéliande in her *Mabinogion*.[55] Vivien's further appearances in Tennyson's *Guinevere* (1859) and *Balin and Balan* (1885) are original narrative details, though the latter idyll is again largely based on Malory.

Generally speaking, Tennyson's narrative and characterisation of Vivien most closely resembles that of Malory's source, the *Post-Vulgate Suite*'s cruel Niniane, though there are many significant differences. Notably, Tennyson's Vivien and Lady of the Lake are separate characters and virtual opposites; Vivien exists as the unprincipled antithesis to Tennyson's "blameless King" while the Lady of the Lake plays the role of Camelot's guardian angel,

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[52] Hallam Tennyson, *Alfred Lord Tennyson: A Memoir by His Son*, (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1897), 2:121; hereafter cited as *Memoir*.
[53] Hallam quoted in *Poems*, 3:393.
[54] Ibid., 3:393.
[55] Southey's translation in "Notes to the Preface," in *The Byrth, Lyf, and Actes of Kyng Arthur; of His Noble Knyghtes of the Rounde Table, Theyr Merveyllous Enquestes and Adventures, Thachyevyng of the Sanc Greal; and in the End Le Morte Darthur, with the Dolourous Deth and Departyng out of thys Worlde of them Al. With an Introduction and Notes by Robert Southey, Esq*., by Sir Thomas Malory, ed. William Upcott, vol. 1 (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1817), xlv-xlvi; Lady Charlotte Guest, "Note on the Forest of Breceliande, and the Fountain of Baranton" in *The Mabinogion from the Llyfr Coch o Hergest and Other Welsh Manuscripts: With an English Translation and Notes*, ed. and trans. Lady Charlotte Guest, vol. 1 (London: Longman, Orme, Browne, Green, and Longmans, 1849), 216-218.

acting as Lancelot's foster mother and the bestower of Excalibur upon Arthur.[56] Unlike her previous incarnations, Tennyson's Vivien holds no sympathy for Camelot, and she desires only to see the kingdom in ruins. While her ultimate target is Arthur, she sets her sights on Merlin after failing to seduce the King, seeking to steal the wizard's "use and name and fame".[57] Tennyson's *Merlin and Vivien* essentially follows the general plot of the traditional entrapment narrative, and in the end, Merlin, who has foreseen his doom, is bested by the devious Vivien and sealed away never to be seen or heard from again. However, it is in the details of the narrative that Tennyson's idyll stands apart from his sources. To begin with, Merlin is largely indifferent to Vivien's presence, and he finds her little more than a petulant "kitten" starved of attention.[58] At no time does Tennyson's wizard mirror the lustful magician of medieval tradition, and it is instead Vivien who stalks him to Brocéliande where, echoing the slandered Lady of the *Prophesies*, he later deems her a "harlot".[59] Like Malory's Nynive, Tennyson's Vivien demonstrates a characteristic hybridity, though she does so primarily as a conniving actress. She furtively arrives in Camelot as the helpless maiden pleading to Guinevere for sanctuary; she becomes the starry-eyed sweetheart during her seduction of Merlin; and she plays the jilted lover when he rejects her false affections. Moreover, Vivien alternatively wears the grossly sensual visages of a burrowing rat, a lowly worm, a lithe snake, a buzzing fly, a cunning spider, and a coiled viper.[60] Differing from the *Morte*'s Nynive, Vivien's hybridity is superficial, and she changes her outward identity only as a means to her disruptive ends. Besides characteristic differences, Tennyson also makes significant alterations to the narrative elements of the story, many of which reappear in subsequent nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature and art involving Vivien: the source

[56] Alfred Tennyson, *Merlin and Vivien*, 162; *Merlin and Vivien* hereafter cited as *MV*; all references to Tennyson's poetry come from the three-volume Ricks edition of the *Poems* (1987) with line numbers cited.
[57] Ibid., 212.
[58] Ibid., 172-175.
[59] Ibid., 819, 829.
[60] Ibid., 110, 194, 240, 256, 257, 843.

of the charm that Vivien seeks to learn from Merlin is a magic book; the prelude to the wizard's ultimate defeat is a dramatic and sexually-charged thunderstorm; and finally, the tomb in which Vivien encloses Merlin is not made of stone but an oak tree. Outside of her own idyll, Tennyson only amplifies Vivien's treacherousness; in *Guinevere*, he casts her as a gossip who tips Mordred off to Lancelot and Guinevere's relationship, while in *Balin and Balan* she is presented as a pagan zealot and the instigator of the eponymous brothers' fratricidal deaths.

Since her first widespread appearance in 1859, Tennyson's incendiary Vivien has continued to garner steady critical attention, both positive and negative. As the quarrel between Williams Buchanan and Swinburne exemplifies, criticism of Tennyson's Vivien often falls on one of two sides: either she is praised as a masterful work of Tennysonian art, or she is sharply rebuked for her immoral feminine behaviour. While a healthy body of criticism surrounding Tennyson's Vivien exists—much of which is reviewed in Chapter 1—seldom is she discussed beyond the context of the *Idylls* and the nineteenth century, and very rarely is she analysed on her own terms. Moreover, that no focused extended study of the medieval Vivien/Lady of the Lake has been attempted, it is unsurprising the critical literature of Tennyson's Vivien consists primarily of journal articles and book chapters. The singular exception is Andrea England Braun's 1994 PhD study, "'The like of her shall have another name than Vivian': Visions and re-visions of Camelot's *other* magician", which approaches Vivien from a third-wave feminist perspective and covers Arthurian literature from Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain* (c. 1136) to Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon* (1982). While Braun devotes a full chapter to Tennyson's Vivien, the study shows bias in painting the poet as inherently sexist and his enchantress as a symptom of nineteenth-century misogyny. Braun argues that Tennyson's *Idylls* cultivates an "anti-

feminist fantasy" wherein Vivien exists merely as "a woman who does not know her place."[61] This argument falls flat because it ignores many of the nuanced characteristics that position Vivien a sympathetic human being and demonstrate her remarkable cultural and historical intelligence. Furthermore, Braun often cherry picks Tennyson's more controversial socio-political comments—such as "Man to command and woman to obey; / All else confusion" from *The Princess* (1847)—to create a uniform but excessively partial critical narrative.[62]

Echoing Braun's study, more recent criticism of Tennyson's Vivien demonstrates the enduring critical vitality of the character, yet it often treats her just as one-dimensionally as Tennyson initially imagined her to be, and so it fails to consider the decades-long evolution of the character in the poet's imagination. Rebecca Umland identifies Tennyson's Vivien as the prototypical Victorian prostitute whose transactional language of "spent" passions speaks to the sexual economics of nineteenth-century Britain.[63] Beverly Taylor similarly recognises Tennyson's enchantress as a strangely bookish "vamp" who exhibits a "predatory sexuality" and largely reinforces Victorian gender inequality and sexual double standards.[64] Offering a fresh critical perspective, A. J. Nickerson suggests that Tennyson's Vivien "is more than Merlin's lover" and symbolic of a "'higher' imaginative state."[65] However, Nickerson only arrives at this conclusion by way of Julia Margaret Cameron's photographs (figs. 1 and 2). As this sample of newer criticism suggests, the artistic and literary influence of Tennyson's Vivien beyond the nineteenth century continues to evade the critical eye. In focusing on Vivien's afterlife in the twentieth century, this study presents a challenge to Larrington's

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[61] Andrea England Braun, "'The like of her shall have another name than Vivian': Visions and re-visions of Camelot's *other* magician" (PhD diss., Saint Louis University, 1994), 38, 53.
[62] Ibid., 53; *The Princess*, V:440-441.
[63] Rebecca Umland, "The Snake in the Woodpile: Tennyson's Vivien as Victorian Prostitute" in *Culture and the King: The Social Implications of the Arthurian Legend*, ed. Martin B. Shichtman and James P. Carley (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994), 278; *MV*, 959.
[64] Beverly Taylor, "Re-Vamping Vivien: Reinventing Myth as Victorian Icon" in *King Arthur's Modern Return*, ed. Debra N. Mancoff (New York: Routledge, 2014), 67.
[65] A. J. Nickerson, "Tennyson and the Gleam," *Victorian Poetry* 59, no. 2 (Summer 2021): 226.

view that "by the end of [nineteenth] century Vivien-Nimuë had exhausted her potential as a focus for exploring the social and psychological complexities of women".[66]

Most critics have determined that Tennyson's Vivien belongs to her age and to her age alone. But as this study works to reveal, she is inherently dynamic and multivalent, and her influence extends well beyond the boundaries of Tennyson's era, his Arthurian epic, and the one-dimensional characterisation to which she is frequently confined. For almost a century after her initial publication Tennyson's Vivien remained squarely in the imagination of many authors and artists. As such, this study has two principal aims: to trace the influence of Tennyson's Vivien on subsequent nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature and art and to analyse the nineteenth- and twentieth-century development of Vivien's character more generally. Regarding the first of these aims, this study seeks to uncover the literary echoes of Tennyson's Vivien not only in subsequent poetry but also the popular Modernist mediums of the short story and the novel, the latter of which, as John Morton points out, was employed by many Tennyson-influenced authors after the outbreak of the Second World War and helped propel the Laureate's "return to favour" in the mid-twentieth century.[67] Similarly, drawing on such studies as Muriel Whitaker's *The Legends of King Arthur in Art* (1990) and Barbara Tepa and Alan Lupack's *Illustrating Camelot* (2008), this study highlights the broader aesthetic influence of Tennyson's Vivien on lesser-known nineteenth- and twentieth-century artists and their Vivien-inspired productions. Regarding the second principal aim, this study reveals the extent to which Tennyson's Vivien and subsequent nineteenth- and twentieth-century depictions of her participate in a grander transtemporal and cross-cultural development of her character within and beyond Arthurian tradition. Therefore, while the

[66] Larrington, *Enchantresses*, 170.
[67] John Morton, *Tennyson Among the Novelists* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), 6.

discussions of this study's two main aims often overlap in the following chapters, the aims themselves should also be considered as fundamentally distinct from one another.

The scope of this study covers Anglo-American Arthurian literature and art between the publication of Tennyson's *Idylls* in 1859 and John Cowper Powys's Arthurian novel *Porius* in 1951. Powys's novel has been chosen as the cut-off point of this study for two reasons: the first being that Powys explicitly refers to his enchantress Nineue as "Tennyson's Vivien" and the second that *Porius*, which Powys commenced writing in 1942, in many ways represents the end of the Modernist period, which, broadly speaking, is the final era in which Tennyson exerted a steady influence on literature and art. Chapters 1 and 2 cover Vivien material produced before 1900, while Chapters 3 and 4 examine works produced after 1900. This study does not aim to be exhaustive but concentrates on authors and artists who have engaged significantly with Tennyson's Vivien in their respective works. It should be noted that not all the authors and artists in this study directly invoke Tennyson's Vivien in their compositions. Often, the characteristic, imagistic, textual, and thematic echoes of Tennyson's Vivien appear as indirect or unconscious developments, though this is not to suggest that such unintentional occurrences are of any less importance to the character's literary and artistic legacy. Additionally, while Vivien, like the majority of pre-nineteenth-century Arthuriana, has historically been the subject of male authors and artists, this study examines both male- and female-created literature and art to give a more complete picture of the broader socio-cultural influence of Tennyson's Vivien in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This study also prioritises male and female authors and artists who have previously been neglected in critical discussion and who remain relatively unknown in the present era, including Sallie Bridges, Richard Hovey, Eleanor Fortescue-Brickdale, Wilfred Scawen Blunt, and Dion Fortune.

Regarding the significant body of nineteenth-century art influenced by Tennyson's Vivien, criticism of this work has seldom ventured beyond the popular compositions of famed nineteenth-century artists such as Julia Margaret Cameron, Gustave Doré, and Edward Burne-Jones (figs. 1-6). Perhaps the main reason that critics have frequently gravitated towards these artists' Vivien compositions is the artists' varying degrees of personal and creative proximity to Tennyson. Critics have consistently highlighted Tennyson's closeness with Cameron who was his next-door neighbour on the Isle of Wight, his general displeasure with Doré's aesthetic vision for the *Idylls*, and his cordial working relationship with Burne-Jones's Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood. A product of individual fame and close ties with Tennyson, a healthy critical discussion of these artists' interpretations of Vivien exists, though it often recapitulates the themes of her troubling seductiveness and ability to stimulate the creative imagination, and therefore it falls short in developing a richer picture of her intricate nineteenth- and twentieth-century character.[68] While this study touches on the work of Cameron, Doré, and Burne-Jones, in the interest of highlighting lesser-known images from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it does not comprehensively discuss them. Many artists covered in this study, such as Fortescue-Brickdale and Howard Pyle, enjoyed comparable popularity to the artists listed above in their own time but have since become niche topics of minor academic interest.

Emulating the complexity of Tennyson's Vivien, this study is a chimera of texts, images, themes, and methodologies. It covers Arthurian poetry and prose from a variety of

[68] Marylu Hill, "'Shadowing Sense at war with Soul': Julia Margaret Cameron's Photographic Illustrations of Tennyson's 'Idylls of the King'," *Victorian Poetry* 40, no. 4 (Winter 2002): 445-462; Amelia Scholtz, "Photographs before Photography: Marking Time in Tennyson's and Cameron's *Idylls of the King*," *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory* 24, no. 2 (2013): 112-137; Joanne Lukitsh, "Julia Margaret Cameron's Photographic Illustrations to Alfred Tennyson's 'Idylls of the King'," *Arthurian Literature* 7 (1987): 145-157; Gilles Soubigou, "Gustave Doré: Interpreter of Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*," in *The Reception of Alfred Tennyson in Europe*, ed. Leonee Ormond (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 63-84; Linda K. Hughes, "Illusion and Relation: Merlin as Image of the Artist in Tennyson, Doré, Burne-Jones, and Beardsley," in *Merlin: A Casebook*, ed. Peter H. Goodrich and Raymond H. Thompson (New York, NY: Routledge, 2003), 378-409; Debra N. Mancoff, "Seduction in the Gallery: 'The Beguiling of Merlin' and Critics of Edward Burne-Jones," *Avalon to Camelot* 1, no. 4 (Summer 1984): 28-30.

genres including tragedy, comedy, satire, epic, children's literature, historical fiction, and occult fiction. The range of artistic mediums includes drawings, paintings, woodcuts, photographs, and ceramics, and in some cases, the artwork accompanies a specific text. Such a wide selection of mediums and genres underscores the multivalency of this study's themes. However, if one theme can be said to permeate the whole thesis, it is that of "feminine consciousness". This theme, insofar as it relates to the character of Vivien, is considered at length from the varying perspectives of world history, transglobal mythology, Western and Eastern religion, and Jungian psychology. From a methodological perspective, this study's operative definition of feminine consciousness is primarily derived from Jung's theory of psychological archetypes which reside in a universal collective unconscious; influenced by Jung's conception of the Mother archetype, this study broadly interprets feminine consciousness as a simultaneously destructive and creative universal principle, the essence of which is an infinite cyclicality of death and regeneration. This definition is used to demonstrate how Tennyson's Vivien inspires visions ranging from destructive feminine evil to constructive and benevolent divine femininity in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Arthurian literature and art. Two further methodological frameworks buttress this study, those of biography and historical chronology. Many authors and artists projected the Vivien of their imaginations onto real world female avatars, sometimes lovers but usually muses—such as Tennyson's early flame, Rosa Baring—whose tantalising affections remained ever out of reach. While not a ubiquitous trait amongst the creative personalities discussed in this study, the frequent and often explicit identification of Vivien in the real world, particularly in the twentieth century, was vital to her wider cultural and artistic development. The chronological arrangement of this study presents two historical arguments about Vivien's evolution across time, the first of which considers that her nineteenth- and twentieth-century development is a continuation of a timeless global development of the idea of feminine

consciousness and a more regional Anglo-American reimagining of Vivien's medieval Arthurian character. The second argument proposes that Vivien's nineteenth- and twentieth-century development was greatly informed by contemporary events and cultural shifts, such as increasing Anglo-American religious scepticism, the advent of modern psychoanalysis, the increasing liberalisation of women in Western consciousness and society, and the transnational horrors brought about by the two World Wars. As a final predicating thought, this study does not argue for one particular reading of the literary and artistic legacy of Tennyson's Vivien but rather encourages the reader to consider the character's creative afterlives from a sympathetic perspective that acknowledges the transhistorical literary and artistic traditions from which she came and those that she would herself inspire.

Chapter 1 details Tennyson's lifelong development of Vivien and her transformation in the poet's imagination from a static feminine evil to a dynamic feminine creative principle. It also reviews her critical reception from the nineteenth century to the present day. Chapter 2 surveys the influence of Tennyson's Vivien on literature and art before 1900. It is split into four sections that cover: the imitative Arthurian poetry produced in the ten years after the *Idylls* first appeared; the satirical responses to the character of the 1870s and 1880s; W. B. Yeats's first play, *Vivien and Time*; and Vivien's poetic glorification at the end of the nineteenth century. Turning to the twentieth century, Chapter 3 begins with a survey of Vivien's various adaptations in children's Arthuriana and discusses how the character became a didactic tool for young readers. This section includes a brief retrospective analysis of nineteenth-century Arthurian children's literature and surveys a handful of key twentieth-century illustrated editions of Tennyson's *Idylls*. Vivien is then examined in the context of Arthurian drama, which was part of a wider Anglo-American dramatic revival that occurred around the turn of the century. The final section of the chapter considers Vivien's presence in the poetry of Wilfrid Scawen Blunt and Edwin Arlington Robinson, both of whom were

significantly affected by the outbreak of the First World War and identified within Vivien a transcendent, and hopeful, feminine essence. Chapter 4 examines the work of the occultist Dion Fortune and the prolific writer and philosopher John Cowper Powys. Vivien le Fay Morgan stars in Fortune's two novels—*The Sea Priestess* (1938) and the posthumous *Moon Magic* (1956)—as a priestess of the goddess Isis and a universal symbol of woman. A product of Fortune's own magical studies, Vivien le Fay Morgan is a manifestation of the universal feminine energy that Fortune believes can elevate human consciousness to supernatural heights. In Powys's titanic novel *Porius*, the sorceress Nineue is depicted as "Tennyson's Vivien". A clever and fatal woman, Nineue in many ways mirrors Tennyson's destructive enchantress. Yet for Powys, she also has the potential to bring about a new Golden Age of humanity.

Chapter 1: Tennyson's Vivien: A Historical and Critical Overview

The character of Vivien was a lifelong preoccupation for Tennyson, and his continued interest in the types of fatal femininity that she embodied for him can be perceived throughout his work. In the thirty years preceding Vivien's public introduction, Tennyson had displayed a subtler yet ever-present fascination with the ambiguous figure of the fatal woman. As Clyde de L. Ryals has pointed out, between the poetry of the 1830s and the first four *Idylls* of 1859, Tennyson gave ample attention to "strong, often cruel, haughty ladies who capture the imagination of the poet and who command his devotion but give nothing in return."[69] No less than fifteen such fatal women as Ryals describes appear in Tennyson's 1830, 1832, and 1842 volumes.[70] Yet, while Ryals offers a concise summary of the Tennysonian fatal women preceding Vivien, even in his younger years Tennyson's vision of the fatal woman was never static and manifested in many variant fatal femininities, all of which would inform Vivien's character.

The fatal woman that pervasively stalks Tennyson's poetry is a powerful shapeshifter of many tricks, talents, and allurements. A brief survey of his early *femme fatales* shows that from a young age Tennyson understood the fatal woman to be a figure of great characteristic flexibility. One of the first fatal women to appear in Tennyson's work is the "airy, fairy" Lilian of the eponymous poem (1830). Similar to her near-homophonic sister, Vivien, Lilian is a young temptress who revels in teasing the poet's passionate heart. Never openly returning her admirer's affections, she is described as "cruel", yet "innocent-arch" and "cunning-simple".[71] Her physical profile, made up of "black-beaded eyes", "crimson-threaded lips",

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[69] Clyde de. L Ryals, "The 'Fatal Woman' Symbol in Tennyson," *PMLA* 74, no. 4 (September 1959): 438.

[70] The "fatal woman" can be identified to some degree in each of the following poems: from *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical* (1830): *Lilian*, *Madeline*, *Adeline*; from *Poems* (1832, "1833"): *Eleänore*, *Fatima*, *The Sisters*, *The May Queen*, *A Dream of Fair Women*, *Margaret*, *Kate*; from *Poems* (1842): *The Palace of Art*, *Lady Clara Vere de Vere*, *Locksley Hall*.

[71] *Lilian*, 7, 13.

and "silver-treble laughter", showcases a tempting and emasculating beauty that the poet is powerless to escape.[72] Lilian's flitting nature is so tantalising that it drives the poet to near madness in his obsession to possess her:

> Praying all I can,
> If prayers will not hush thee,
> Airy Lilian,
> Like a rose-leaf I will crush thee,
> Fairy Lilian.[73]

In *A Dream of Fair Women* (1832), Tennyson imagines the supremely beautiful Helen of Greek myth as a pinnacle of fatal femininity. Acknowledging her own destructive reputation, Helen laments that "Where'er I came / I brought calamity".[74] Despite her ruinous capacities, her idyllic face remains one which the poet admits he would gladly die for in battle. In the same poem the poet is captured by the haughtily smiling Cleopatra who recounts her near-omnipotence over the hearts and minds of men:

> I governed men by change, and so I swayed
> All moods. 'Tis long since I have seen a man.
> Once, like the moon, I made
>
> The ever-shifting currents of the blood
> According to my humour ebb and flow.[75]

While the young Tennyson keenly perceived the fatal woman's grip on his own imagination, he did not imagine her as solely external to or even distinguishable from himself. In *The Palace of Art* (1832, 1842) the fatal woman manifests as Tennyson's own feminine soul—selfish and stubborn, she finds pleasure in her extended isolation all the while "singing and murmuring in her feastful mirth" at the expense of social obligation.[76]

The fatal woman did not merely reside in Tennyson's imagination but found a real-world expression in Rosa Baring—the poet's first serious love. First introduced to Tennyson

[72] Ibid., 15, 23, 24.
[73] Ibid., 26-30.
[74] *A Dream of Fair Women*, 95-96.
[75] Ibid., 130-134.
[76] *The Palace of Art*, 177.

roughly two years before he left for Cambridge in 1827, Rosa became the object of the poet's intense infatuation following his departure from university and return to Somersby in 1831. Possessed of exceptional and lifelong beauty, Rosa has been remembered as "a thoroughly ordinary gentlewoman—complacent, slightly vain, and not at all inclined to introspection or reflection—who took life pretty much as it came".[77] Far from a fleeting springtime love for Tennyson, he referred to Rosa, among many other affectionate terms, as his "Rose of roses, bliss of blisses".[78] Nor was the young poet's infatuation short-lived, as in 1836, in a curious inversion of a prostrate Vivien at the feet of Merlin, he declared to her that "my whole heart is a vassal at thy feet."[79] Yet, while Tennyson pined away for Rosa in his poetry, often at her own eager suggestion, she could never wholly return his affections. H. D. Rawnsley, a family friend of the Tennysons, remembered how Rosa "would tell of how she . . . in admiration of the young poet, would ride over to Somersby, just to have the pleasure of pleasing him or teasing him as the case might be."[80] Tennyson's plight of love was exacerbated by his poor standing with Rosa's parents, who never considered him a suitable marriage partner. Disillusionment eventually set in for Tennyson, and in the dedicatory poem *To Rosa* (1836), he lamented that his "Sole rose of beauty, loveliness complete" had withered into a mere coquette:

she cannot love,
And if you kissed her feet a thousand years,
She still would take the praise, and care no more.[81]

Nevertheless, Rosa remained a lifelong muse for Tennyson, and her presence haunts even his most well-known work; Rosa's imprint can be read in such characters as the materialistic Amy of *Locksley Hall*, the teasing and enchanting Maud, and the insincere and unfaithful

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[77] Ralph W. Rader, "Tennyson and Rosa Baring," *Victorian Studies* 5, no. 3 (March 1962): 228.
[78] *Early Verses of Compliment to Miss Rosa Baring*, 5.
[79] *To Rosa*, 14.
[80] H. D. Rawnsley, *Memories of the Tennysons* (Glasgow: James MacLehose and Sons, 1900), 62-63.
[81] *To Rosa*, 1; *Three Sonnets to a Coquette*, II:12-14.

Ettarre of the *Idylls*. Yet, whatever opinions Tennyson came to hold of Rosa, he ever thought of her, even in his final years, as "*My* Rose".[82]

Influenced by a substantial cohort of poetic predecessors and the ever-present heartbreak of the Rosa Baring affair, Vivien is Tennyson's most potent and enduring expression of the fatal woman. As a coalescence of the ideal and the real fatal woman, she manifests as Tennyson's archetypal *femme fatale*, or as Ryals has suggested, his "purely objective portrait" of feminine fatality.[83] Other Tennysonian women such as the enthralling Eleänore or the adulterous Guinevere could plausibly lay claim to the title of his "quintessential fatal woman". However, Tennyson's repeated return to Vivien and her story over fifty years suggests that she was not only the most vital and dynamic manifestation of his feminine obsession but also one of his most objectively expressive and thought-provoking poetic figures. While many enchanting women found their way into Tennyson's poetry, only Vivien kept the poet's imagination so consistently spellbound.

Vivien began to weave her magic in Tennyson's poetic imagination around the time he fell under Rosa's spell in the early 1830s, and she became a central figure in the poet's plan for an Arthurian work from its earliest stages. In 1833, Tennyson outlined a five-act musical masque of which acts three and four were to involve Nimuë's entombment of Merlin and her discovery of Lancelot and Guinevere—scenes which would later appear in the *Idylls*.[84] When Tennyson finally settled on what he described as "the final shape" of the *Idylls* in 1855, he began with the story of Merlin and Vivien—started in February 1856 and finished on 31 March of the same year.[85] The poem was privately printed in 1857 as part of a trial

[82] *The Roses on the Terrace*, 3; emphasis in original; It is worth noting that Rosa's continued presence in Tennyson's poetry does not appear to have caused any significant tension between him and his wife, Emily Sellwood, whom he married in 1850. Emily remained supportive of Tennyson throughout his poetic career, and following the poet's death in October 1892, she aided the couple's son Hallam in preserving her husband's life and legacy in the *Memoir*.
[83] Ryals, "'Fatal Woman'," 443.
[84] For Tennyson's dramatic outline see *Poems*, 3:256-257.
[85] *Memoir*, 1:414, 2:125.

edition of *Enid and Nimuë: the True and the False*. A particularly negative anonymous review of Nimuë's character—detailed below—prevented Tennyson expanding the poem's publication, and, in an effort to mitigate further negative reception of her character, he waited until 1859 to publish the retitled *Vivien* alongside *Enid*, *Elaine*, and *Guinevere* as the first instalment of the *Idylls of the King*. As part of his expansion of the *Idylls* in the 1870s, Tennyson changed the title of the poem to *Merlin and Vivien* in 1870 and in 1874 added one hundred and forty lines to the front of the poem which further introduced Vivien as a member of King Mark's immoral court and an orphan of Arthur's wars. Following this lengthy addition, Tennyson felt that further introduction to *Merlin and Vivien* and Vivien's arrival in Camelot was needed. He thus set to writing *Balin and Balan* between 1872-1874, with the completed poem—the last of his *Idylls*—finally published in 1885, the same year that the final edits to *Merlin and Vivien* were made.

Tennyson's Vivien was subjected to an avalanche of criticism from her initial drafts, and her earliest opposition came from those closest to the poet. In 1856, James Spedding—an intimate friend from Tennyson's Cambridge days and one of the first readers of *Nimuë*—wrote to the poet voicing his displeasure of her seduction of Merlin.[86] The following year, Tennyson recalled the six trial copies of *Enid and Nimuë* after a particularly scathing local review of *Nimuë* reached his ear. As he wrote to the Duchess of Argyll:

> I have heard of "a blustering mouth" . . . a man, a friend it was said, to whom I read or showed the Nimuë, who in lieu of giving his opinion honestly at the moment, [appears] to have gone brawling about town, saying that such a poem would corrupt the young, that no ladies could buy it or read it etc. etc. Such chatter is as unhandsome, as the criticism is false. Nevertheless why should I expose myself to the folly of fools . . . . I should indeed have thought that the truth and purity of the wife in the first poem might well have served as antidote to the untruth of the woman in the second. Perhaps I shall wait till I get a larger volume together and then bring out these with others.[87]

[86] See *Poems*, 3:393.
[87] Alfred Tennyson to the Duchess of Argyll, [6 or 13] June 1857, in *The Letters of Alfred Lord Tennyson*, ed. Cecil Y. Yang and Edgar F. Shannon, Jr., vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 2:179.

Tennyson's initial plan to publish *Nimuë* and *Enid* together as the first two *Idylls* was at last abandoned, and it was only amongst the further company of *Elaine* and *Guinevere* in 1859 that he finally felt comfortable bringing *Vivien* into the public spotlight.

Unfortunately for Tennyson, the addition of *Elaine* and *Guinevere* did little to obscure Vivien's effect on the *Idylls* as a whole, and for many critics, the inclusion of such a devious character ruined much of the poetic effort. The *New Quarterly Review* believed Vivien to be "so revolting and unfeminine" that she was artistically irredeemable.[88] Meanwhile, *Fraser's Magazine*, having found the subject of Vivien's seduction of Merlin "beyond all measure painful to dwell upon", was only too happy to "pass on willingly to the more pleasing pain of Elaine's story."[89] *Chambers' Journal*, who perhaps turned the coldest shoulder towards Vivien, did not acknowledge a single word of her existence in their review of Tennyson's volume, speaking only of her three idyllic sisters. The vile air that surrounded Vivien did not dissuade every detractor from confronting her at length, and the harshest critics, such as the *British Quarterly Review*, did not mince their words:

> Vivien intrudes as a mocking Death between the figures of Enid and Elaine, and we seem to lose half our pleasure in their wifely and maidenly devotion when we see it parodied by this woman-fiend. . . . There is little story to relieve the monotone of Vivien's falsehood. . . . Mr. Tennyson has painted for us that loathsome thing, a fleshly woman without soul, in whose faults we have not even the interest of blame; one beyond nature, but in some things so womanly that we are grieved with a doubt lest such could be, so wholly compacted of malice and mean curiosity of knowing, that she might work the greater harm.
> . . . .
> Even the wild flowers of Broceliande wither in Mr. Tennyson's hands when he would weave them round the baleful Vivien. [90]

Of all her characteristic faults, it was Vivien's severely tainted womanhood that the *British Quarterly Review* identified as her most fatal; not only was she "unfeminine" but a wholly

[88] "Mr. Tennyson," *New Quarterly Review* 8, no. 31 (July 1859): 346-347.
[89] "Idylls of the King," *Fraser's Magazine* 60, no. 357 (September 1859): 306.
[90] "Idylls of the King," *British Quarterly Review* 60 (October 1859): 495-496.

unnatural creature from the depths of hell—a diabolical "woman-fiend" possessed of a "cloven foot" who belonged to "the blasted heath and shrieking forest of Broceliande".[91]

Tennyson's considerable 140-line addition to the beginning of *Merlin and Vivien* in 1874 appears to have been an attempt to further humanise Vivien by framing her as an orphan of war, but it did little to alter the popular negative preconceptions of her character. Critics largely passed over Vivien's backstory in the interest of Tennyson's newer *Idylls* published in 1869 and 1871—especially the long-awaited *Holy Grail*—and as late as 1885 before her appearance in *Balin and Balan*, she was still considered "a too real and unlovely harlot, too gross and veritably breathing, to be in proportionate harmony with the general design" of the *Idylls*.[92] When she appeared once more in *Balin and Balan*, this time as an instigator of fratricide and prophet of the sun, most critics paid little attention to her. One reviewer briefly and vaguely acknowledged that Tennyson's final idyll threw "fresh light on the poet's conception of the Vivien", while another found her decidedly "more shameless and less seductive than the crafty deceiver of Merlin."[93] By the end of the nineteenth century, it seemed nothing and no one could redeem Tennyson's Vivien.

Modern criticism has on the whole treated Vivien more objectively than her Victorian readership. However, many twentieth- and twenty-first-century critics have exacerbated Vivien's reputation by not only echoing the Victorian rhetoric regarding her inhumanity and unfemininity, but also by developing a new matrix of literary symbolism and Victorian interpretation that further aggrandises her wickedness. By far the most common method of vilifying Vivien has been to compare her to other notorious literary villains, and critics of all eras have nearly universally acknowledged that her most potent parallels reside in the Bible.

[91] "The Idylls of the King," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 86, no. 529 (November 1859): 614; "Idylls," *British Quarterly Review*, 497.
[92] Roden Noel, "The Poetry of Tennyson," *Contemporary Review* 47 (February 1885): 216.
[93] S. G. Green, "Lord Tennyson's Latest Poems," *Leisure Hour* (February 1886): 99; "Tiresias and Other Poems," *Saturday Review* 60, no. 1573 (19 December 1885): 811.

From her first appearance, she has alternatively come across as either Satan, Eve, Lilith, or a convincing Delilah to Merlin's Samson. Many modern critics have built on Vivien's biblical resonances by reading her deposition of Merlin through a Miltonic lens, identifying her as either Milton's Satan or Eve, often a hybrid of both.[94] Outside of Milton and the Bible, the list of Vivien's villainous literary parallels has grown to include Virgil's duplicitous Fama (Rumor), Spenser's beautiful and seductive Duessa, Shakespeare's opportunistic Edmund, Keats's chameleonic Lamia and mesmeric La Belle Dame sans Merci, Thackeray's slanderous Becky Sharp, and Rossetti's self-absorbed Lilith.[95] In identifying Tennyson's Vivien across a broad range of literary history, modern criticism has made her into something of a literary hydra; on the one hand frightening because she evokes a multitude of seductive literary evils, yet on the other hand more frightening because her character is all too familiar and seemingly ever-recurring.

While Vivien's transtemporal literary parallelism accounts for much of her modern perception, many recent critics have considered her essentially a representative of Tennyson's own day and age. As Stephen Ahern contends, Vivien, like Tennyson's other idyllic women, is principally a "Victorian construction of woman" who is "a symbolic repository of social values."[96] Some critics have therefore mapped Vivien's character and the negative repercussions of her presence in Camelot onto the Victorian social landscape. Thus,

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[94] Thomas P. Adler, "The Uses of Knowledge in Tennyson's Merlin and Vivien," Texas Studies in Literature and Language 11, no. 4 (Winter 1970): 1397-1403; William W. Bonney, "Torpor and Tropology in Tennyson's 'Merlin and Vivien'," Victorian Poetry 23, no. 4 (Winter 1985): 351-367; J. M. Gray, *Thro' the Vision of the Night: A Study of Source, Evolution and Structure in Tennyson's Idylls of the King* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1980), 51-59; Gordon S. Haight, "Tennyson's Merlin," Studies in Philology 44, no. 3 (July 1947): 554; Donald S. Hair, *Domestic and Heroic in Tennyson's Poetry* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), 176; John D. Rosenberg, *The Fall of Camelot: A Study of Tennyson's Idylls of the King* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 114.

[95] Catherine R. Harland, "Interpretation and Rumor in Tennyson's *Merlin and Vivien*," *Victorian Poetry* 35, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 57-68; Thomas Hoberg, "Duessa or Lilith: The Two Faces of Tennyson's Vivien," *Victorian Poetry* 25, no. 1 (Spring, 1987): 17-25; J. M. Gray, "Fact, Form and Fiction in Tennyson's *Balin and Balan*," *Renaissance* 12 (1968): 108.

[96] Stephen Ahern, "Listening to Guinevere: Female Agency and the Politics of Chivalry in Tennyson's *Idylls*," *Studies in Philology* 101 (2004): 89; See also Linda M. Shires, "Rereading Tennyson's Gender Politics" in *Victorian Sages and Cultural Discourse: Renegotiating Gender and Power*, ed. Thaïs Morgan (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 61-65.

while David Staines and Linda Shires find Vivien to be representative of "wanton sensuality" and the "sexuality that taints Camelot", Rebecca Umland associates Vivien's "harlotry" with the Victorian prostitute—a figure emblematic of the era's contagious fear of disease transmission and moral degradation.[97] Umland points to Vivien's orphaned upbringing and seduction by Mark's lustful enterprise as comparable to the fate of many disadvantaged Victorian girls. Additionally, Umland argues that Tennyson's vocabulary in *Merlin and Vivien* invokes a language of sexual economics, particularly during the climactic storm: in this highly suggestive scene, Merlin and Vivien's passions are "spent", and the charm that he "yields" up becomes her profit at his expense.[98] Similarly, Vivien's underhanded antics and sharp tongue have been linked to the more unbecoming aspects of Victorian media circulation. For Catherine Harland and Agnieszka Setecka Vivien is the "underside of [Arthur's] ideal enterprise" and "the instigator of scandal", while James Eli Adams reads Vivien's actions as evocative of the uglier side of Victorian publicity more specifically populated by so-called "base interpreters" whose weapons were "rumor, scandal, gossip, and open publication."[99] Although many Victorians felt Vivien's character to be entirely remote from their own time, more recent criticism has found her residing inconspicuously in the gutters of Victorian social strata.

While the significance of Tennyson's Vivien has frequently been sought externally to the *Idylls* and even to Tennyson himself, some critics have considered Vivien as a fundamental negative aspect of the moralising human—and Tennysonian—spirit. As the anti-Arthur, F. E. L. Priestly declares Vivien to be an "active and irreconcilable evil" who corresponds with the darkest side of human nature.[100] In the same vein, Philip J. Eggers

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[97] Umland, "Snake in the Woodpile," 274-287.
[98] *MV*, 958, 964.
[99] James Eli Adams, "Harlots and Base Interpreters: Scandal and Slander in Idylls of the King," *Victorian Poetry* 30, no. 3/4 Centennial of Alfred, Lord Tennyson: 1809-1892 (Autumn - Winter 1992): 422.
[100] F. E. L. Priestly, "Tennyson's Idylls" in *Critical Essays on the Poetry of Tennyson*, ed. John Killam (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960), 243.

acknowledges Vivien as a "consciously destructive spirit", with David Staines adding that she is an "embodiment of active evil" and all the more threatening because she is "totally and knowingly evil."[101] As these three critics highlight, Tennyson's Vivien possesses more self-awareness and personal agency than any woman in the *Idylls*. And though Vivien's unusual sense of self-determinism can be considered socially progressive with respect to her womanhood, her unsurpassed agency makes her simultaneously dangerous when considered from the perspective of moralistic human action; not only does she represent humanity's capacity for evil, but also the spirit that wilfully works evil on another for personal advancement. Retreating further inwards to the personal spiritual realm, Fred Kaplan reads the conflict between Merlin and Vivien as an analogue of Tennyson's poetic soul. In Kaplan's analogy, Merlin represents the "fallen artist" and Vivien "the negative side of creativity or the imagination, the dark and destructive force in the poetic whirlwind." Merlin's downfall at the hands of Vivien can thus be read as an example of the imagination's "failure . . . to sustain creativity" and a resultant period of creative dormancy.[102] Exceeding Tennyson's concern over the vitality of his own creative life, it has also been suggested that Vivien is an expression of the poet's broader existential anxieties. John R. Reed argues that Vivien's general pessimism echoes the young Tennyson's suicidal "voice of despair and doubt" from *The Two Voices*, while John D. Rosenberg further suggests that her destroy-all attitude represents the "nihilistic exuberance" that threatened to annihilate the budding poet's very sense of self.[103] As such, Vivien has appeared to be as much a monstrous incarnation of humanity's crueller instincts as she has a devil on Tennyson's own shoulder.

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[101] Phillip J. Eggers, *King Arthur's Laureate* (New York: New York University Press, 1971), 151; David Staines, *Tennyson's Camelot: The Idylls of the King and its Medieval Sources* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1982), 28.

[102] Fred Kaplan, "Woven Paces and Waving Hands: Tennyson's Merlin as Fallen Artist," *Victorian Poetry* 7, no. 4 (Winter 1969): 285-286; see also Summer J. Star, "Reading it Properly: The Poetics of Performance and Tennyson's 'Merlin and Vivien'," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 58, no. 2 (Summer 2016): 224-249.

[103] John R. Reed, *Perception and Design in Tennyson's Idylls of the King* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1969), 50; See also Rosenberg, *Fall of Camelot*, 110.

Beneath the mountain of negative criticism that Tennyson's Vivien has incurred rests a subtler, yet no less significant body of criticism that has viewed the character and her story from a more sympathetic perspective. And like her initial opponents, Vivien's earliest advocates were some of those closest to Tennyson—including Tennyson himself. With the first draft of *Nimuë* in hand at the end of March 1856, the poet felt "that he had never written [anything] better".[104] Tennyson's enthusiasm was shared by his wife, Emily, who thought that Nimuë's song—"Trust me not at all or trust me all in all"—was nothing short of "exquisite".[105] The poem also garnered plenty of praise from Tennyson's closest friends, many of whom, Emily recorded, were "astonished at its grandeur."[106] Even Coventry Patmore, the famed author of *The Angel in the House* (1847) championing the ideal marriage and feminine domesticity, believed *Nimuë* to be "grander" than *Enid*, the sexual politics of which were more aligned with his own poem. Following the publication of *Vivien* in 1859, the Reverend Benjamin Jowett—later Master of Balliol College, Oxford, and an intimate friend of the Tennyson's—wrote to Tennyson in praise of his enchantress:

> Of the other poems [besides *Elaine*] I admire "Vivien" the most (the naughty one), which seems to me a work of wonderful power and skill.
>
> It is most elegant and fanciful. I am not surprised at your Delilah reducing the wise man, she is quite equal to it.
>
> The allegory in the distance *greatly strengthens, also elevates, the meaning of the poem.*[107]

As Jowett's comments highlight, those who were most intimately familiar with Tennyson's poetic mind often found significant meaning beneath Vivien's devilish exterior and frequently elevated her beyond the one-dimensional feminine evil that many other critics believed her to be.

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[104] Charles Tennyson, *Alfred Tennyson* (London: Macmillan, 1949), 299.

[105] Emily Tennyson to Thomas Woolner, 20 March 1856, in *The Letters of Emily Lady Tennyson*, ed. James O. Hoge (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1974), 94.

[106] Emily Tennyson to Thomas Woolner, 11 April 1856, in *The Letters of Lady Tennyson*, 95; Emily Tennyson, *The Farringford Journal of Emily Tennyson, 1853-1864*, ed. Richard J. Hutchings and Brian Hinton (Newport: Isle of Wight County Press, 1986), 45.

[107] Benjamin Jowett to Alfred Tennyson, 17 July 1859, in *Memoir*, 1:448-449; italics in original.

The general "grandiosity" recognised in *Vivien* by Tennyson's friends and family was more plainly acknowledged by critics after 1859 in terms of the poem's superb artistry. Whatever faults in personality the Victorians saw Vivien projecting, the idyll in which she starred was still largely considered to be an artistic success. Even those who most deplored Vivien's character acknowledged the masterful skill with which Tennyson handled her story. The *British Quarterly*, who felt that Broceliande wilted in Vivien's presence, was still "ready to praise the singular art with which this miniature of false woman and fooled sage is painted".[108] William Ewart Gladstone, who likewise took no pleasure in dwelling on the wily woman "between elf and fiend", could not "but estimate very highly the skill with which Mr. Tennyson has secured to what seemed the weaker vessel the ultimate mastery in the fight. . . . In force and richness of fancy, as well as in the skill of handling, this poem is indeed remarkable among the four."[109] While some reviewers timidly admitted the artistic strengths of Tennyson's poem, others expressed unfettered admiration. One reviewer considered *Vivien* to be "the most perfect poem. . . . a veritable gem of the first water, without flaw, faultless of its kind." Another believed it to express a "statuesque purity" and a "natural nobility of [Tennyson's] mind". Perhaps most ostentatiously of all, the *National Magazine* declared that "since Shakespeare wrote his *Venus and Adonis*, a more charming poem was never contrived."[110] As for the character herself, Vivien embodied the kind of tantalising beauty and seductive attraction that would become synonymous with Aesthetic and Decadent movements that blossomed over the final quarter of the nineteenth century, and she was seen by many as a forerunning expression of "art for art's sake".

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[108] "Idylls," *British Quarterly Review*, 495.

[109] William Gladstone, "Tennyson's Poems," *Quarterly Review* 106, no. 212 (October 1859): 471.

[110] "Idylls of the King," *Sharpe's London Magazine* 30 (July 1859): 332; "Idylls of the King," *North British Review* 31, no. 61 (August 1859): 165; "Mr. Tennyson's Idylls," *National Magazine* 6, no. 34 (August 1859): 170.

For some nineteenth-century critics, the artistry of Tennyson's poem was further elevated by what was perceived to be an essential humanity underscoring Vivien's seduction of Merlin. *Bentley's Quarterly Review* felt that Tennyson's idyll was no mere fantasy, but captured perfectly "the melancholy fact [of] how easily a man's mature wisdom may be beguiled by an artful woman." As the reviewer further expounded:

> [Tennyson's] sympathies are with Merlin, through whom the truth is very skilfully wrought out, that mere abstract knowledge of men is worth very little when we come to practice. We are all more on an equality in this respect than could be supposed. There are persons who seem to possess an instinctive insight into character, who talk with surprising perception of motives, but who are quite as often taken in as the rest of us; like the poor Merlin who sees every step of Vivien's treachery, and yet is its victim.[111]

What Tennyson had presented in *Vivien* was therefore a familiar story of the problematic limitations of pure intellect in the face of sensual temptation. The *Saturday Review* similarly acknowledged that "the victory of Vivien over the wizard is effected by methods which prevail in everyday life, after it has been combated by wise reflections, which also too often fail to preserve modern wisdom from the arts of contemporary beauty."[112] Yet, the mind was not only considered by many Victorians to be at risk from the baser attractions of contemporary beauty—such as amoralist sensual art—but the enticing conveniences of modern industry, capitalism, and moral expediency that was encapsulated by institutions like prostitution. Just as *Vivien* was perceived by some critics to encapsulate the modern pitfalls of everyday Victorian life, the idyll was considered by some as a poem for the masses about the masses. J. M. Ludlow suggested that the average working-class reader would most likely empathise with the grittier humanity presented in *Vivien* over the high-minded idealism espoused by Arthur's court in the other three *Idylls*. As he wrote:

> To the great mass of readers in the working, and what may be called the quasi-working classes (clerks, assistants, and such like), King Arthur and his Court are personages very far removed from all subjects of ordinary interest. The 'fashionable

[111] "Tennyson—Idylls of the King," *Bentley's Quarterly Review* 2, no. 3 (October 1859): 180.
[112] "Idylls of the King," *Saturday Review* 8, no. 194 (July 16, 1859): 76.

> vice,' though, alas! far from unknown amongst them, exhibits generally for them few of those softer features which it may assume in tales of knighthood, which form, perhaps, its chief danger among the more leisurely classes. And so it will be only one here and there who will feel how *true* the poem is under its fictitious garb; what noble, practical, human purpose pervades all its airy fancies and quaint conceits. Strange to say, so far as my experience goes, of the four idylls, it is 'Vivien' which seems to take most hold, for the present, of minds of the classes to which I am referring. A prison schoolmaster,—surely no mean authority on such matters,—has remarked to me on the deep 'knowledge of human nature' which it evinces.[113]

As Ludlow understood it, the common reader would not relate to the upper-class exceptionalism of Arthur and his court, and as such, most of the Victorian population would identify, if somewhat begrudgingly, with the real humanity expressed in flawed characters like Vivien and Merlin.

While modern critics have largely refrained from passing hard moral judgements on Tennyson's Vivien, a growing recognition of her ironical nature has cast something of a respectable light on her character as a whole. Since her inception Vivien's antagonistic purpose within Tennyson's Camelot has never been doubted, yet it has become increasingly evident to critics that she possesses an unusually refined intellect that is employed to great effect. In particular, Vivien's ability to argue cohesively and convincingly against Merlin's half-hearted defences of the Round Table has led Eggers to recognise her as an "accomplished sophist", while her systematic moral debasement of Arthur and his knights has garnered her the title of "ruthless logician".[114] Additionally, some critics have found that Vivien's grasp of the truth regarding the perilous state of Camelot complicates her standing as essentially evil. However much her seductiveness and deceptiveness threaten the kingdom's idealistic integrity, as Harland notes, "Vivien's most fatal attribute is that she tells the truth."[115] Indeed, the most ironic aspect of Tennyson's Vivien is that her deception is rooted in truth, and the lies she tells and the rumours she spreads, while often embellished,

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[113] J. M. Ludlow, "Moral Aspects of Mr. Tennyson's 'Idylls of the King'," *Macmillan's Magazine* 1, no. 1 (November 1859): 71.
[114] Eggers, *King Arthur's Laureate*, 152; Gray, *Vision of the Night*, 101.
[115] Harland, "Interpretation and Rumor," 60.

are never false. Vivien perceives that no one in Camelot takes her charges seriously partly out of hubris but more specifically because she is a woman.[116] Thus, truth becomes a weapon with which Vivien seeks, as Hoberg suggests, to overthrow the world that has rejected her "or at least make [Camelot's citizens] know they've been in a fight."[117] While largely failing in the latter sense, Vivien's merciless wielding of truth succeeds in propelling Camelot towards its final dissolution. William E. Buckler further attributes Vivien's ultimate success in her schemes to "her singleness and fixity of purpose." Citing her lyrical declaration that "faith and unfaith can ne'er be equal powers", Buckler believes Vivien holds an innate advantage over Merlin because, unlike the wizard, she harbours "no such doubts or half-beliefs" about herself or the hypocritical state of the Round Table—she knows who she is and what she is capable of, and therefore, she is perhaps more authentic than anyone else in Tennyson's Camelot.[118]

As the subject of both sharp rebuke and high praise, Tennyson's Vivien has cultivated a decisive critical divide over the moral and social implications of her character. However, that she has remained such a polarising figure since her initial appearance suggests that she has always been an inherently ambiguous character who easily lends herself to subjective interpretation. A small subset of modern criticism has demonstrated an awareness of Vivien's underlying equivocality. J. M. Gray has pointed to Vivien's fundamental ambiguity by way of her mimetic talents and the ease with which she switches between the roles of scorned maiden and ardent lover, petulant kitten and coiled viper.[119] Like Gray, Ingrid Ranum has considered the implications of the breadth of Vivien's mimetic range, and defines Tennyson's

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[116] *MV*, 694.
[117] Hoberg, "Duessa or Lilith," 22.
[118] William E. Buckler, *Man and His Myths: Tennyson's Idylls of the King in Critical Context* (New York: New York University Press, 1984), 106; *MV*, 386.
[119] Gray, *Vision of the Night*, 103.

enchantress only in the vague terms of an "indecipherable human-serpent-monster".[120] From her first appearance, Vivien's unsettling chameleonic behaviour has generally been considered as one of her more terrifying traits and further grounds for her rejection from Camelot and Victorian society at large. However, as Harland suggests, the generally negative emotional response to Vivien has kept her from being understood more objectively as a kind of abstraction of a "communal view which sees everything differently."[121] Thus, as horrifically chimerical and disruptive as Vivien can seem to the resolute idealist, she can also be considered more liberally and less controversially as a heterogenous mixture of human beliefs, emotions, and actions that invokes the breadth of human physical and psychological potential. She is therefore an embodiment of difference, variability, and ambivalence.

Beyond her shifting aesthetics and behaviours, other critics have located Vivien's ambiguity in her paganistic worldview. Thomas Hoberg suggests that she is a representation of pagan order and so works *amorally* rather than immorally against Arthur's Christian order.[122] In a similar sense, Bonney understands Vivien as "a child of previous historical cycles which Camelot sees as evil but are merely prior and different."[123] From this perspective, Vivien's presence in Camelot merely signifies the beginning of a new historical cycle rather than the final Christian Apocalypse. Further appealing to Vivien's ambiguity from a religious standpoint, Bonney also claims that "the biblical imagery [in *Merlin and Vivien*] does nothing to suggest that the narrative of the poem is following Edenic tropes", and so a narrative of good and evil.[124] Likewise, Kaplan, who considers Vivien to be allegorical in nature, more broadly suggests that the poem's "divine imagery doesn't

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[120] Ingrid Ranum, "Tennyson's False Women: Vivien, Guinevere, and the Challenge to Victorian Domestic Ideology," *Victorian Newsletter* 117 (Spring 2010): 47.
[121] Harland, "Interpretation and Rumor," 62.
[122] Hoberg, "Duessa or Lilith," 21, 23.
[123] Bonney, "Torpor and Tropology," 356.
[124] Ibid., 356.

necessarily work divinely."[125] The most convincing example of these counter-claims can be seen through Vivien's invocation of Mary Magdalene. Early on in her encounter with Merlin, Vivien appears as the contentious biblical woman grovelling in front of the wizard, offering him water from her palms, and bathing his feet as Mary Magdalene does for Jesus just before his crucifixion.[126] Neither an Edenic nor an essentially divine figure, Mary Magdalene is historically one of the Bible's most ambivalent presences. Similar to Vivien's critical outlook, she has been viewed by some Christian sects as the sinful yet Christ-redeemed prostitute and by other, more unorthodox, denominations as Christ's most beloved disciple. As such, Mary Magdalene appears to be Vivien's most apt biblical comparison as a figure who most plainly represents the breadth of human moral-spiritual potential—from its licentious worst to its principled best. The essential ambiguity of Tennyson's Vivien is therefore made more apparent—indeed, ironically so—by the same biblical source that would seemingly cast her as a devil in disguise.

Whatever the critical opinion of Tennyson's Vivien, Tennyson himself gradually came to reconsider the value and significance of the woman he once deemed unequivocally "False". Hardly the effect of a late-life epiphany, Tennyson's multifaceted understanding of Vivien can be perceived as early as 1859. While the moralising title of "the True and the False" from the 1857 trial edition of *Enid and Nimuë* was initially retained for the title of the 1859 first edition of *The True and the False: Four Idylls of the King*, in the same year Tennyson dropped "the True and the False" and settled on *Idylls of the King*.[127] There is no explicit evidence as to why Tennyson almost immediately decided to cut the ethical distinction from the title of his new volume, yet he gave a possible reason for the change in 1868, when he reflected: "*Idylls of the King* implies something more and other than mere

[125] Kaplan, "Woven Paces," 289, 297.
[126] *MV*, 271-282; *Luke* 7:36-50 (Authorized King James Version).
[127] Richard Jones, *The Growth of the Idylls of the King* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1895), 49-50.

legends of Arthur: else why did I not name the book Idylls of King *Arthur*? It should have been clearer to my readers that in the very title there is an allusion to the King within us".[128] For Tennyson, the *Idylls* was from its inception a story of humanity. Therefore, he may have discarded "the True and the False" meta-title because he had always perceived, in a manner of speaking, a measure of truth about human experience in every part of his epic—including Vivien. Indeed, without the "False" label hanging over her, what Tennyson depicts in Vivien is perhaps a vulgar woman, but not an existentially false or evil woman. While not possessed of the ideal feminine grace underlying each of Enid, Elaine, and Guinevere, Tennyson was early on aware that, at her core, his Vivien represented a real human woman who deserved at the very least some genuine feeling of pity.

As the critical discussion above suggests, Victorians found it exceedingly difficult to pity Vivien, and those who might have intimately sympathised with her for whatever reason never expressed it publicly. Even the critics who praised Tennyson's handling of Merlin and Vivien's story were wont to sympathise with the old wizard's relatable human inability to resist the figurative maelstrom of temptation that they saw Vivien embodying—that is also to say that Victorians rarely acknowledged Vivien in human terms. However, at least one early reviewer of the *Idylls* felt that Vivien was not all bad and argued that "something of human nature [can be perceived] in her very fears."[129] While very much an isolated and unpopular opinion, this observation points to a subtext of Vivien that has been consistently overlooked by critics yet seems to reveal Tennyson's possible deeper sympathies for the character.

As unnaturally wicked as Vivien may appear, much of her motivation can be traced back to the palpable human fear she subtly conveys. Though never made explicit, it appears that Vivien's principal fear of loneliness stems from the lack of trust, and thus a general

[128] Alfred Tennyson to James Thomas Knowles, 20 or 21 August 1868, in *Letters of Alfred Lord Tennyson*, 2:501; emphasis in original.
[129] "Tennyson's 'Idylls of the King'," *Eclectic Review* 2 (September 1859): 291.

feeling of irrelevancy, that she experiences in Camelot. Ironic as this fear is coming from her, she naturally seeks external validation and lashes out when it is not given. That she prizes outward affirmation can first be perceived when she is mocked for her attempted seduction of Arthur, but it is more apparent in Merlin's general half-hearted disposition towards her.[130] Merlin's "half disdain" for and "half belief" of Vivien perpetually frustrates her attempts to gain the wizard's "proof of trust" and "proof of love", and it is his eventual weariness of her—as well as his insinuation that she is no more than a harlot—that causes her most violent yet also most genuine emotional outburst.[131] Vivien's fear of being ignored also stems from an awareness of the limitations of her own womanhood. She perceives that the validity and effect of her word is directly impacted by her sex, and that she cannot "tell a tale"—be it true or false—because, as a woman, anything she says will always be interrogated. Vivien's fear of irrelevancy is further captured by her goal to steal away Merlin's "greatness"—his "use and name and fame".[132] While her pursuit on the one hand appears to be one of mere material conquest, on the other hand she seems to desire precisely those attributes which are highly valued by the knights of the Round Table—for the knightly quest demonstrates use, makes a name, and ensures fame. Thus, there is the delicate suggestion that Vivien would as soon count herself among Camelot's ranks than see the kingdom destroyed, but only should Arthur's court extend a genuine hand towards her, which it never does. Vivien's fear ultimately demonstrates an acute awareness of her own conscious limitations and the knife's edge she walks on between Mark's and Arthur's courts merely to survive. It is as if Tennyson imbued Vivien with his own fears of maintaining social relevancy, and so his own poetic livelihood, in a critically harsh world.

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[130] *MV*, 148-149, 161-162.
[131] Ibid., 176-177, 184, 329, 352, 398, 836.
[132] Ibid., 216, 302.

The first major sign of Tennyson's evolving understanding of Vivien can be perceived within the 1874 addition to the beginning of *Merlin and Vivien*. Composed around the same time as *Balin and Balan* (1872-1874), the new introduction expounds on Vivien's background and her affiliation with Mark's court, as well as develops her motivations for undermining Camelot. While the expanded introduction does little to change Vivien's role as Arthur's moral counterpoint, it dramatically humanises her in a way that makes it difficult for the reader not to sympathise with her to some degree. Of all the new details that Tennyson added to Vivien's narrative, none is more significant than the revelation of her identity as an orphan of Arthur's wars. While initially plotting Camelot's downfall with Mark, Vivien reveals that her motivation to break Arthur and his kingdom was instilled at birth:

> My father died in battle against the King,
> My mother on his corpse in an open field;
> She bore me there, for born from death was I
> Among the dead and sown upon the wind . . . .[133]

These lines enhance Vivien's wickedness as a veritable "daughter of death", yet their literal interpretation suggests a much different reality for Vivien as well as imply that Tennyson was conscious of the hypocrisies underlying his idyllic Camelot. Firstly, that Vivien was born of human parents suggests that she possesses more intrinsic humanity than the demon-sired Merlin—indeed, her only affiliation with "hell" beyond that of Mark's court is the human-hell of the battlefield. Beyond the matter of human parentage, the circumstances of Vivien's birth also reveal a difficult truth about Arthur; that is, beneath the crown of idealism, Tennyson's stainless King cannot escape his identity as a warlord, and the fact that he is responsible for the destruction of societies and families. Vivien and her parents represent the true cost of Arthur's idealism and his effort to consolidate Camelot: they are casualties of war, and Vivien a survivor who bears a legitimate grudge. Vivien is then taken in by Mark,

[133] Ibid., 41-45.

whose court only propagates her hatred and the darker side of her human nature. As Vivien relates, under Mark's tutelage she discovered only "that old true filth, and bottom of the well, / Where Truth is hidden", and so was raised on sordid "maxims of the mud".[134] Tennyson's additional background for Vivien solidifies her role as Arthur's primary nemesis, yet also implies that she is the product of an unsympathetic world that has disregarded her wellbeing, let alone her very existence, since birth. She is therefore a nurtured evil rather than a natural one, and so an even greater tragedy that speaks to a wilfully careless society.

Tennyson's exposition of Vivien's upbringing is not the only evidence that he was beginning to reconsider the complexity of her symbolic meaning. The lines added in 1874 incorporate the moment of Vivien's arrival in Camelot, wherein she encounters Guinevere on her way to meet Lancelot. Playing the role of the helpless maid, Vivien throws herself at Guinevere's feet and pleads for sanctuary:

> Poor wretch—no friend!—and now by Mark the King
> For that small charm of feature mine, pursued—
> If any such be mine—I fly to thee.
> Save, save me thou . . . .
> . . . .
> Be thine the balm of pity . . . .
> . . . .
> Help, for he follows! take me to thyself!
> O yield me shelter for mine innocency
> Among thy maidens![135]

The first of her deceptive schemes in Camelot, Vivien's display is all an act, yet her ingenuine plea is yet again riddled with irony, for the portrait she paints of herself details more truth than deceit. None of what Vivien relates to Guinevere is objectively false, and beneath the misdirection of performing the part of the helpless damsel appears to be a genuine cry for help. Considering her violent birth and savage rearing, the sympathetic mind—be it Tennyson's, the reader's, or even Vivien's own—can easily take her for a "poor

[134] Ibid., 47-49.
[135] Ibid., 74-83.

wretch", one who has been let down by society time and again. Vivien exclaims that she is friendless, and in doing so emphasises just how isolated she truly is; she maintains only the most tenuous of relationships with Mark, and even this bond is more of a practical "understanding" than a mutual affection. Neither is the innocence Vivien professes to Guinevere entirely erroneous considering that the hostile environment in which she was brought up gave her little opportunity for self-determination. Behind Vivien's ploy is a bedrock of truth, and so her "fear-tremulous, but humbly hopeful" eyes express both the unreality she employs as a weapon against Camelot and the reality that underscores her tragic existence.[136] While Tennyson hides much of Vivien's characteristic and emotional complexity behind walls of double meaning, she openly—and seemingly uncharacteristically—covets the love that Guinevere and Lancelot share. In an intimate moment that finds Vivien alone spying on the happy couple, she looks on eagerly and plainly covetous of the lovers' "mortal dream that never yet was mine".[137] Tennyson himself felt that this instance of vulnerability was "the only real bit of feeling, and the only pathetic line which Vivien speaks".[138] However, this claim appears unconvincing because, as her run-in with Guinevere demonstrates, truth and pathos underscore even her most deceptive speech. Moreover, there is nothing in the *Idylls* besides Merlin's half-hearted scorn to suggest that Tennyson did not in some measure sympathise with Vivien's social and familial plights and her ultimate tragedy of a loveless life.

It is in *Balin and Balan*, the last of the *Idylls* to be published, that Tennyson's development and understanding of Vivien's character takes its most significant turn. Yet, as intimated above, critics have largely forgone searching out any deeper meaning respecting Vivien's presence in *Balin and Balan* because, as the unremorseful instigator of fratricide,

[136] Ibid., 84.
[137] Ibid., 114-115.
[138] Tennyson quoted in *Poems*, 3:399n114-116.

she seems to be no less singularly evil than she appears in her eponymous idyll. To be certain, Vivien's initial appearance in *Balin and Balan* does nothing to dispel the notion that she is anything but an agitator; she is introduced as a "warbling" damsel-errant whose presence dumbs "the wholesome music of the wood" through which she rides on her way to Camelot.[139] While Tennyson frames Vivien in *Balin and Balan* in much the same way as he frames her in *Merlin and Vivien*—as a pest-like nuisance—the first lines she "warbles" are some of the most significant in the whole of the *Idylls*. Horse-mounted and with squire in tow, Vivien chants:

> "The fire of Heaven has killed the barren cold,
> And kindled all the plain and all the wold.
> The new leaf ever pushes off the old.
> The fire of Heaven is not the flame of Hell.
>
> "Old priest, who mumble worship in your quire--
> Old monk and nun, ye scorn the world's desire,
> Yet in your frosty cells ye feel the fire!
> The fire of Heaven is not the flame of Hell.
>
> "The fire of Heaven is on the dusty ways.
> The wayside blossoms open to the blaze.
> The whole wood-world is one full peal of praise.
> The fire of Heaven is not the flame of Hell.
>
> "The fire of Heaven is lord of all things good,
> And starve not thou this fire within thy blood,
> But follow Vivien through the fiery flood!
> The fire of Heaven is not the flame of Hell!"[140]

At a glance, Vivien's words read like the paganistic battle cry of the "heathen hordes" that Arthur works relentlessly to subdue.[141] Yet, upon further meditation, they reveal the impressive objective vision with which Vivien perceives Camelot in the grand scheme of natural and historical order. And while seemingly at odds with Arthur's Christian vision,

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[139] *Balin and Balan*, 430-432; hereafter cited *BB*.
[140] Ibid., 434-449.
[141] *The Coming of Arthur*, 518; hereafter cited *CA*.

Vivien's paganistic outlook has surprisingly more in common with the King's idealism and Tennyson's own matured worldview than has previously been considered.

Though Tennyson's Vivien and Arthur have long been considered antithetical to one another, they are not perfect opposites, and they demonstrate an unusual sympathy of character through their symbolic associations with the sun. A long-standing and general symbol of pre- and post-Christian pagan religions, the sun does not operate as a static symbol of religious distinction in the *Idylls*. Indeed, Tennyson's use of solar symbolism appears to be rather inconsistent, as he ironically employs the sun as both the principal emblem of Vivien's heathen faith and as one of the central metaphors for the King himself. During Arthur's coronation, all of Camelot cries out:

> Blow, for our Sun is mighty in his May!
> Blow, for our Sun is mightier day by day!
> Clang battleaxe, and clash brand! Let the King reign.[142]

While Vivien's and Arthur's solar associations may seem to suggest an inconsistency of symbolism on Tennyson's part, they actually demonstrate a significant conceptual consistency respecting an objective vitality of spirit that underlies each of their characters. As an avatar of "the fire of Heaven", Vivien represents the arduous force that works to burn away the cold asceticism blanketing Camelot and thereby usher the realm into a new "summertime" of life-affirmative naturalistic idealism. In a similar sense, the "sunrise" of Arthur's arrival in Camelot revitalises the "wasteland" of Cameliard beset by bandits, beasts, impassable growth:

> he drave
> The heathen; after, slew the beast, and felled
> The forest, *letting in the sun*, and made
> Broad pathways for the hunter and the knight[143]

[142] Ibid., 496-498; For Arthur's further solar associations see also *Lancelot and Elaine*, 123 and *The Passing of Arthur*, 385. *The Passing of Arthur* hereafter cited *PA*.
[143] *CA,* 20, 58-61; my emphasis.

Both Vivien and Arthur bring a sense of renewal to the kingdom and the only difference in their respective vitalities is a matter of the expression of what can be called the "solar principle". With respect to Vivien, the sun represents the "fire within [the] blood", that "fiery flood" of human desire and passion that is not necessarily vulgar but is always and essentially life-affirming; Vivien's solar principle can therefore be considered as life-sustaining by way of an emphasis on spiritual enthusiasm. In terms of Arthur, the sun is a physical manifestation of spiritual order that is then reflected in his ordering of Camelot. Thus, Arthur's solar principle can be considered in conjunction with Vivien's as life-sustaining by way of an emphasis on spiritual order. To extend the analogy a bit further, Vivien is the blood, Arthur is the body, and they coalesce into a metaphorical Christ-figure whose physical-spiritual totality is represented by the vital energy and "perfect" form of the sun.

As the idealistic similarities between Vivien and Arthur begin to suggest, there is as much of Tennyson's own unorthodox Christian faith as there is nondescript heathenism in Vivien's solar sermon. The most obvious of her Tennysonian resonances can be found in her criticism of institutionalised religion. While perhaps not as overtly critical of Christian clergy as Vivien is, Tennyson had been sceptical of the church's role in personal spiritual matters at least since his university days, and he, under the influence of his Apostolic brotherhood at Cambridge, grew to believe that one's relationship with God was a private matter and that true faith could only be found through personal reflection. Furthermore, Tennyson had demonstrated an antipathetic attitude similar to Vivien's towards religious asceticism in *St. Simeon Stylites* (1833, 1842).

Despite parallel criticisms of religious establishment, Tennyson was rather sceptical of Vivien's naturalistic spiritualism—a brand of faith that finds proof of God's existence in the natural world. As late as 1892, the poet professed:

> God is love, transcendent, all-pervading! We do not get this faith from Nature or the world. If we look at Nature alone, full of perfection and imperfection, she tells us that

> God is disease, murder and rapine. We get this faith from ourselves, from what is highest within us, which recognises that there is not one fruitless pang, just as there is not one lost good.[144]

Feeling that nature was violently "red in tooth and claw", Tennyson succinctly summarised that his belief in God therefore came "not from what I see in nature, but from what I see in man."[145] As a counterpoint to Tennyson's views, Vivien, who has nothing but bad experiences with humanity, finds God—or at least an analogous divinity—in nature. As a result, Vivien's outlook on the natural world appears to be much more optimistic than Tennyson's; she can admit, like Tennyson, that nature breeds death, but she can also perceive that it is also responsible for the generation of life. Of course, Tennyson himself was not so naïve to disregard the fundamental duality of nature that Vivien so easily perceives, and a substantial body of criticism demonstrates just how much the poet revered the natural world in all its beautiful and violent aspects.[146] Most tellingly, however, is that in one of the first poems that Tennyson composed upon learning of the death of Arthur Hallam in 1833, he wrote of nature as a reflection of God:

> Nature, so far as in her lies,
> Imitates God, and turns her face
> To every land beneath the skies,
> Counts nothing that she meets with base,
> But lives and loves in every place[147]

Ever the poet of "two voices", Tennyson's view of nature fluctuated between positive and negative perceptions throughout his life. But that is not to suggest that he did not have something of a more cohesive theory regarding humanity's evolving understanding of the natural world. Particularly through the figure of Vivien, Tennyson seems to imply that when humanity looks into "Nature alone" without the buoy of faith the resultant discovery will be

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[144] *Memoir*, 1:314.
[145] *In Memoriam*, LVI:15; *Memoir*, 2:374.
[146] Norman Lockyer and Winifred Lucas Lockyer, *Tennyson as a Student and Poet of Nature* (London: Macmillan), 1910
[147] *On a Mourner*, 1-5.

that man is no more than a beast inhabiting a disheartening world of death. However, for the individual who has found faith within and for themselves—like Vivien has, however heretical her faith may appear—nature projects itself as more than a mere killing field to the point of manifesting as the mirror image of God. From this perspective, Vivien's naturalistic faith is emblematic of her harmonisation with the natural world while Arthur's humanistic Christian faith emphasises his failed attempt to subdue the natural forces threatening Camelot, including humanity's baser instincts. While Tennyson was by no means a proponent of Vivien's brand of faith, it appears that he admired the fervour with which she kept her faith to some degree. Moreover, if Tennyson had found nothing about Vivien's faith with which he could sympathise, it is all the more curious that it is Vivien—Nature's fatal harbinger—who ultimately, and with no small amount of irony, survives.

The most convincing evidence in *Balin and Balan* of Tennyson's re-evaluation of Vivien's significance can be found in her subtle comment on historical cyclicality. In the first stanza of her solar prophecy, Vivien observes that "the new leaf ever pushes off the old". More than just a casual meditation on the ways of nature, Vivien's declaration is a veritable echo of the dying words of Tennyson's Arthur:

> The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
> And God fulfils himself in many ways,
> Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.[148]

Both Vivien and Arthur know that change is an unassailable principle of existence. Yet each perceives this fact from a different perspective—she from the vantage point of nature, and he from the seat of civilisation. Despite a difference in perspective, and while working with different operative symbols, both Vivien and Arthur arrive at a similar understanding of the essence and necessity of change; the old leaf, like the old custom, must make way for the new generation, and just as the survival of nature requires constant renewal, so too does the

[148] *Morte d'Arthur*, 240-242; *PA*, 408-410; also *CA*, 508.

survival of humanity require a steady reinvention of custom to meet new physical and spiritual demands. Through Vivien and Arthur, Tennyson thus posits the natural cycle and the human-historical cycle as essential parallels. More than this, though, Tennyson communicates one of his most significant later-life beliefs through the duality of Vivien and Arthur. While Tennyson believed that the spiritual principle underlying Christianity would endure for all time, he knew that spiritual custom, including that of Christianity, would ever be the subject of change depending on the day and age. What became important for the elderly poet was therefore an objective "Faith beyond the forms of Faith".[149] Tennyson was all too aware at the end of the rapidly-modernising nineteenth century that newer forms of faith including those revived forms of sun-worship would, as Vivien metaphorically puts it, eventually "beat the cross to earth".[150] Yet, no matter the fate of the Christian custom and symbol, Tennyson's principal concern was with the survival of the faith which provides the bedrock of religious custom and symbol. Accordingly, the *Idylls* does not end on a note of despondency following the death of Arthur and the Christian custom he espouses, but rather the finale rings out with a hope for the survival of the vital faith Arthur embodies. As the King's funeral barge vanishes over the horizon, the last line of the epic portends: "And the new sun rose bringing in the new year."[151] While a hopeful image, it remains an ambiguous one. With Arthur gone, only Vivien possesses the spiritual arduousness to lead the new generation. As Tennyson himself perhaps realised, this is not quite the apocalyptic scenario it appears to be. Vivien may represent the arrival of a dramatically new religious custom, but she expresses a comparable vitality of faith to Arthur's which ultimately signifies that she, like the King, works more generally towards the objective spiritual development of humanity.

[149] *The Ancient Sage*, 69.
[150] *BB*, 452.
[151] *PA*, 469.

And as a final thought, Tennyson may have considered that once the sun had set on the modern customs of Vivien, it could once more rise over the nobler ways of Arthur.

Tennyson's engagement with Vivien did not end with *Balin and Balan*. In 1889, the poet published the last of his Arthurian-themed poems, *Merlin and the Gleam*. The poem serves as an allegory of Tennyson's life, and though he was highly critical of biography's tendency to distort truth, he wrote it "for those who cared to know about his literary history", adding that it "would probably be enough biography for those friends who urged him to write about himself."[152] In the poem, the elderly Tennyson takes on the guise of the "graying" wizard—"*I* am Merlin," he declares, "And *I* am dying."[153] Having been rediscovered by a "young Mariner", Merlin recounts the most formative moments of his life and his tireless pursuit of the "Gleam". He tells of the powerful wizard who first taught him magic and encouraged him to follow the melody of the "Gleam"; it has been suggested that Merlin's teacher represents the "Wizard of the North", Walter Scott, whom Tennyson idolised in childhood.[154] Merlin then details his journey over stream and mountain as he chased after the melody until it finally brought him to Arthur and the golden days of Camelot; as is widely known, Tennyson associated King Arthur with his dear Cambridge friend Arthur Hallam—arguably the most important person in Tennyson's life and the greatest influence on his poetic career. Merlin finally recalls how the "Gleam" waned with the King's death but would not die, and ever urged him onward even as he approached the limits of his own mortality; as this recollection intimates, Tennyson was devastated by Hallam's sudden death in 1833, and like Merlin, it was only the "Gleam" of his poetic calling that propelled him onwards. In a resounding echo of Tennyson's Ulysses, the aging yet defiant Merlin at last implores his listener to always "Follow the Gleam" wherever it may lead.[155]

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[152] *Memoir*, 1:xii, xv.
[153] *Merlin and the Gleam*, 7-8; emphasis in original; hereafter cited *MG*.
[154] Haight, "Tennyson's Merlin," 565; *Memoir*, 1:12.
[155] *MG*, 131.

While Tennyson formulated *Merlin and the Gleam* as an allegory, the "Gleam" itself contained for him a very specific meaning. As the poet elaborated: "In the story of *Merlin and Nimuë* I have read that Nimuë means the "Gleam", which signifies in my poem the higher poetic imagination."[156] Linda K. Hughes and A. J. Nickerson have suggested the possible influence of John Veitch's *Merlin* (1889) and Wordsworth's *Elegiac Stanzas* (1807) on Tennyson's conception of the "Gleam".[157] In Veitch's poem, published only four months before Tennyson wrote *Merlin and the Gleam*, the "Gleam" represents the spirit of Merlin's lover who died and reappears "as a glint on a hill".[158] As in Tennyson's poem, Veitch's Merlin constantly hears the "Gleam" singing to him, and when he dies, he proclaims: "Now we are one—one in our strength and love", bound evermore "As life on life evolves, infinite life / Th' unwearied process of th' eternal years".[159] In Wordsworth's *Elegiac Stanzas*, the "gleam" manifests as "The light that never was, on sea or land, / The consecration, and the Poet's dream".[160] Thus, for Wordsworth as for Tennyson, the "Gleam" suggests the transcendent power of the poetic imagination. As Christopher Ricks and Gordon Haight have both argued, the Nimuë that Tennyson associates with the "Gleam" is not the Vivien of the *Idylls*.[161] While in many ways true, it should not be thought that the two are entirely conceptually distinct. Nor should it be taken for granted that, as Haight asserts, Tennyson "was not thinking at all" of Vivien when he came to associate Nimuë with the "Gleam". To be sure, Vivien does not represent Tennyson's higher poetic imagination; however, she can be seen as symbolising another vital aspect of the poet's imagination. Recalling Fred Kaplan's argument, Vivien may appear to be symbolic of the "lower" aspect of the poetic

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[156] Tennyson quoted in *Poems*, 3:205.
[157] Linda K. Hughes, "Text and Subtext in 'Merlin and the Gleam'," *Victorian Poetry* 23, no. 2 (Summer 1985): 164-166; Nickerson, "Tennyson and the Gleam," 229-231.
[158] John Veitch, *Merlin* in *Merlin and Other Poems* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1889), 26.
[159] Ibid., 35, 36.
[160] William Wordsworth, *Elegiac Stanzas Suggested by a Picture of Peele Castle, In a Storm*, *Painted by Sir George Beaumont* in *The Major Works*, ed. Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 326.
[161] See Ricks in *Poems*, 3:205; Haight, "Tennyson's Merlin," 559.

imagination, which Kaplan suggests is negative and destructive in principle. Kaplan's observation is on the right track, yet as Tennyson's development of Vivien in the *Idylls* suggests, she symbolises much more than the imagination's negative and destructive capacities. To amend Kaplan's observation, Tennyson's Vivien can be thought of more broadly as a representation of the "darker side" of the poetic imagination which, while maintaining the propensity for destruction, is as fundamentally dynamic as the "higher"—or "brighter"—imagination. And as Vivien's solar declaration illustrates in *Balin and Balan*, she has as much innate potential to create and vivify as she does to destroy.

To further elucidate the operative dualism of Tennyson's "bright" Nimuë and "dark" Vivien, it is helpful to consider the pair collectively as a prototypical expression of Carl Jung's psychoanalytical theory of individuation. Jung maintains that foremost challenge and also the ultimate goal of human experience is psychic individuation—that is, the process of becoming "a psychological 'individual'", or "a separate, indivisible unity or 'whole.'"[162] Broadly defined by Jung as the "harmonisation" of the conscious and unconscious mind, individuation has most commonly been discussed in the context of the integration of conscious "ego"—the conscious awareness and continuous sense of personal identity—with the unconscious "shadow"—the unconscious complex of attributes that we dislike about or try to hide from ourselves.[163] In order for the individual to become "whole", Jung argued that neither the ego nor the shadow could be allowed to dominate the other and that true individuation meant the integration of all aspects of the psyche, regardless of whether those aspects are perceived as good or bad. As he writes: "Conscious and unconscious do not make a whole when one of them is suppressed and injured by the other. If they must contend, let it

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[162] Carl Gustav Jung, *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, ed. Gerhard Adler and R. F. C. Hull, vol. 9i (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 275.
[163] Ibid., 9i:289.

at least be a fair fight with equal rights on both sides. Both are aspects of life."[164] Moreover, both are aspects of the Self.

Considering Jung's theories, Tennyson's Nimuë and Vivien can be interpreted as participating in a Tennysonian "individuation of imagination", with Nimuë representing the poet's ego and Vivien representing his shadow. Additionally, if Tennyson's "Gleam" appears to represent something "higher" than mere ego, Nimuë can be considered as an expression of Tennyson's Freudian "ego ideal"—or the perfected image of the self to which the ego aspires.[165] In the context of Tennyson's broader Arthurian narrative, the *Idylls* can be read as a narrative of imaginative individuation, with Arthur standing in for Nimuë through the "Gleam" that comes to rest "on the forehead / of [the King]".[166] As the tragedy of Tennyson's epic would suggest, the *Idylls* tells a story of failed individuation. Both Arthur as Camelot's "ego" and Vivien as Camelot's "shadow" over-express themselves and their respective ideals while simultaneously suppressing the other, and the result of this disharmony is Camelot's ultimate destruction. From Tennyson's perspective of the poetic imagination, since neither Arthur nor Vivien objectively prevails in their designs, Camelot's destruction can be interpreted as a stasis of the imagination and the prospect of creative dormancy. Arthur and Vivien as ego and shadow are both fundamentally dynamic but neither is self-sustainable, and so they necessarily burn out, leaving the kingdom—and so the imagination—in limbo. It therefore appears that Tennyson came to realise that both the "brightness" of the imaginative ego—as embodied by Arthur and later Nimuë—and the "darkness" of the imaginative shadow—as embodied by Vivien—are essential to the vitality and ever-renewing inspiration of poetic imagination. Jung writes that "as a totality, the self is a *coincidentia oppositorum*; it

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[164] Ibid., 9i:288.

[165] For Freud's development of the "ego ideal" see Chapter 3 of "On Narcissism: An Introduction," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey, vol. 14 (London: Hogarth Press, 1957), 92-102.

[166] *MG*, 72-73.

is therefore bright and dark and yet neither".[167] In the same sense, Tennyson's Nimuë and Vivien both do and do not represent the bright and dark aspects of the imagination, for they ultimately exist as two sides of the same conceptual coin, complete in and of itself.

Tennyson's Vivien is more complex and nuanced than many critics have made her out to be. Though she lives up to her "wily" moniker in more ways than one, she also demonstrates an innate and sympathetic humanity that complicates her definition as the antithesis to Tennyson's blameless King. Moreover, her characteristic vitality, while certainly more unpredictable and chaotic than that of Arthur's and Nimuë's, proves to be an essential aspect of the poet's ontology of the imagination. As I aim to demonstrate in the remainder of this study, the legacy of Tennyson's Vivien in nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature and art is as complicated as she is. And as I seek to reveal, Vivien's legacy differs, as Tennyson himself may have put it, at "worst and best, from Heaven and Hell."[168]

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[167] Carl Gustav Jung, *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, ed. by Gerhard Adler and R. F. C. Hull, vol. 14 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), 108n.
[168] *MV*, 813.

Chapter 2: Vivien in the Nineteenth Century

I. Vivien's First Decade

Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* was an immediate success upon its first publication in 1859. Accordingly, a boom in new Arthurian literature and art quickly followed and a host of work imitating Tennyson's new epic materialised in earnest. The first significant appearance of Vivien outside of Tennyson's *Idylls* is found in Robert Buchanan's poem *Merlin's Tomb* from his *Fragments of the Table Round*. Though Buchanan claims to have had the poem printed in 1839, it only became more accessible to the public after the *Idylls* had been published, sometime between late 1859 and early 1860. A Scottish native and long-time professor of logic at the University of Glasgow, Buchanan was also an adept poet and dramatist. Though he published a fair number of poetic collections and tragic dramas between 1856 and 1868, little if any of his work outside of his scholastic contributions to the University of Glasgow garnered any significant critical or public attention. As such, Buchanan's Viviane has remained little more than a footnote in the annals of Arthurian literature.

Buchanan's decision to publish his *Fragments of the Table Round* only a few months after the appearance of the *Idylls* meant that his volume, like most subsequent nineteenth century Arthurian stories, would find itself ever in the titanic shadow of Tennyson's epic. Indeed, so monumental and ubiquitous was Tennyson's achievement—even in its infancy—that some authors, including Buchanan, were increasingly inclined to defend the authenticity of their own productions as free from any Tennysonian influence. To combat any potential accusations of plagiarism Buchanan attached a disclaimer at the front of his *Fragments*:

> It may be proper to state that the following FRAGMENTS, one—that entitled *Merlin's Tomb*, was printed in 1839; and another—that relating to the death of King Arthur (now very considerably altered), in 1840, in the pages of a provincial Album.

> The other Fragments, though, as well as these two, composed long before either of the above dates, are now published for the first time.[169]

Though Tennyson is not mentioned by name in the foreword, Buchanan's trepidations about potential Tennysonian readings of his own volume are anything but subtle. Buchanan first aims to ground his *Fragments* in a period before any of Tennyson's Arthurian work was widely published in 1842. Yet even more telling, that he highlights his own stories of Merlin and Viviane and Arthur's death—stories which in nineteenth-century Britain became strongly associated with Tennyson—indicates something of a personal apprehension about potential claims of plagiarism. Regrettably for Buchanan, his volume went largely unnoticed by critics; however, he was at least spared any unwanted plagiaristic accusations.[170]

Merlin's Tomb is a two-part poem that retells the story of Merlin's entrapment at the hands of Viviane. Further distancing himself from Tennyson, Buchanan writes that his principal narrative source is "the account which the *Romance of Merlin* [*Vulgate Estoire*] gives of the final disappearance of the great enchanter."[171] Taking the *Estoire* for his guide, part one of Buchanan's poem finds Viviane resting alone with Merlin beneath Broceliande's forested bowers and musing on the lessons he has taught her. Buchanan breaks from the *Estoire*'s expedited narrative to have Viviane appraise her specific achievements:

> "And I can bid the bright noontide
> Turn to a midnight gloom,
> And toothless crone seem bonny bride
> To mock the gay bridegroom.
>
> "And I can tame the proudest knight,
> And change to hart or hare,
> And crowd with keep and castled height
> The void abyme of air.
>
> "And I can bridge the ocean-stream;

[169] Robert Buchanan, *Fragments of the Table Round* (Glasgow: Thomas Murray and Son, 1859), i.
[170] A brief, relatively uninterested word about Buchanan's Arthurian poems appeared well after the volume's publication in 1868 as part of a review of a collection of his work; "Professor Buchanan's Poems," *London Review of Politics, Society, Literature, Art, and Science* 16, no. 402 (March 14, 1868): 257-258.
[171] Buchanan, *Fragments*, 72.

On moorland waste and wild,
Bid forest wave, or palace gleam
By silver lake in-isled.

"And I can wake ærial strain,
The moping mood to cheer,
As viol, lute, orpherien,
Did mix sweet music near.

"And I can bid with hound and horn
The mimic huntsman ride
With shout o'er fell and forest borne,
Athwart the welkin wide.

"And I can make knight, countering knight,
Career with levelled lance,
Or dames and squires to bevy bright
In masque or merry dance."[172]

Though Viviane acknowledges that her accomplishments are impressive, she laments that Merlin has not yet taught her how to imprison him within a "loving bower".[173] As Merlin does in the *Estoire*, Buchanan's Merlin acknowledges that he is simply too enchanted by Viviane to resist her request and immediately relinquishes his knowledge of the spell to her, thus closing part one of the poem.

Part two of *Merlin's Tomb* continues the development of the *Estoire* narrative, this time expounding on Merlin and Viviane's sojourn in Broceliande. Seemingly happily in love, they drink from the enchanted fountain of Berenton and, echoing Chrétien and the *Mabinogion*, sprinkle the fountain's waters on its "stony mount" aiming "to prove the legend true" and bring about a storm.[174] As if by miracle or Viviane's own magic, the legend becomes reality, and the lovers are forced to take shelter from the ensuing tempest. After dallying a while longer in amorous company, the pair come to rest under a hawthorn tree, and

[172] Robert Buchanan, *Merlin's Tomb* in *Fragments of the Round Tables* (Glasgow: Thomas Murray and Son, 1859), 66-67.
[173] Ibid., 67.
[174] Ibid., 69; This legend first appears in Chrétien de Troyes's *Yvain ou le Chevalier au Lion* (c. 1180). Buchanan may have also been familiar with Lady Guest's translation of *Owain, or the Lady of the Fountain* which appeared in the first volume of her *Mabinogion* in 1838—one year before Buchanan claims to have first published *Merlin's Tomb*.

with Merlin asleep, Viviane declares: "Now is the time to prove my spell— / My spell of wonderous power!" Following the *Estoire*, she then seals the wizard within a magically-wrought "prison-bower".[175] Merlin awakens almost entirely unperturbed by imprisonment while Viviane rejoices in her victory. The poem closes on a weeping Arthur who is grief-stricken at the loss of Merlin and a steed-mounted Gawayne seeking desperately but in vain for the wizard's tomb.

If Buchanan did harbour any serious anxieties about potential accusations of plagiarism of Tennyson's narrative or his characterisation of Viviane, then his principal concerns would likely have been directed towards particular elements of his poem rather than its narrative. Most strikingly, the climactic storm usually considered to be a unique element in Tennyson's idyll also appears in Buchanan's story. Even more curiously, both storms appear because of Vivien's actions: Tennyson's Vivien curses the heavens moments before a lightning bolt strikes an oak tree and Buchanan's Viviane enacts the legend of the fountain. Yet aside from similar environmental conditions, it is Buchanan's language that draws the clearest parallels between his and Tennyson's enchantresses. As Tennyson's Merlin loses his "use and name and fame" by teaching Vivien the fatal charm, Buchanan's Merlin similarly witnesses "his purpose [die]" after granting Viviane knowledge of the deadly spell.[176] Like Tennyson's Vivien, Buchanan's enchantress not only exerts control over Merlin's physical body but also a potentially more fatal power over his enduring identity. An even more striking linguistic parallel comes at the close of Buchanan's poem:

> "Such fortune still must fool betide
>   Will trust a woman's wile!
>
> "The fatal coil thine art hath wove
>   Thine art can ne'er undo!"[177]

[175] Buchanan, *Merlin's Tomb*, 70.
[176] *MV*, 372; Buchanan, *Merlin's Tomb*, 68.
[177] Ibid., 71.

Buchanan's Viviane identifies herself in terms identical to Tennyson's description of Vivien, that of the wily serpentine woman coiling herself around Merlin. What is more, she echoes Vivien's cry of "fool" that reverberates through the forest at the close of Tennyson's idyll.

There is one final parallel that may have made Buchanan wary about comparisons between his poem and Tennyson's: that of the theme of Eden. Buchanan begins his poem with lines that read much like an epigraph:

> Ah fatal thirst—Ah fond aspire
> Forbidden things to know!
> Dis-Edener thou of our first sire!
> Well-spring of all our woe!
>
> The first device the tempter tried,
> Thou art his favourite still,
> Dost woo and win him, his witch-bride,
> Soul-pledged to work his will.[178]

What makes Buchanan's introduction to *Merlin's Tomb* intriguing is his identification of Viviane within biblical tradition. She is the dedicated "witch-bride" of the "tempter" Satan and therefore, like Tennyson's Vivien, can be read as either an Eve or a Lilith figure. And as with Tennyson's Vivien, it is not sex but knowledge—the "Dis-Edener"—that fuels Viviane's lust—her "fatal thirst"—in Buchanan's poem. Buchanan would likely have recognised the Edenic parallels between his and Tennyson's enchantresses. This specificity may have been one of the catalysts that facilitated Buchanan's decision to include the disclaimer at the beginning of his *Fragments*, especially since despite claiming to have published his *Merlin's Tomb* two decades before Tennyson's Vivien made her first public appearance, the association of Vivien with the Edenic serpent only became popular after Tennyson's idyll was published. So though Buchanan attempted to distance himself from Tennyson and the *Idylls* as a whole, the Laureate's enchantress may have given him extra cause for plagiaristic concern.

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[178] Ibid., 65.

Buchanan's early attempt to distance his *Fragments* from Tennyson's *Idylls* was not unusual, nor was it a merely provincial British reaction. The shadow of Tennyson's *Idylls* was long, and its presence could be felt all the way across the Atlantic Ocean. In Philadelphia, Sarah Bridges Stebbins—more commonly known as Sallie Bridges—also worried about publishing an Arthurian volume in the wake of Tennyson's *Idylls*. In *Marble Isle: Legends of the Round Table and Other Poems* (1864), she stressed in a foreword:

> Several years before reading a line of Tennyson, I had met with the old romance of "Prince Arthur," translated from the French. Observing then the poetical nature of many of its incidents, I selected for future experiment most of those which afterwards formed the groundwork of these legends; though some —"The First Meeting of Launcelot and Guinevere," "The King and the Bard," and "Avilion"—had their origin entirely in my own imagination. The first six of the series were printed in the "Evening Journal" of Philadelphia, in 1857; the next two were published in 1859, before the appearance of "Idylls of the King;" the rest were written since, with the exception of "The Best Knight," and "The Last Meeting of Launcelot and Guinevere," which were composed more than a year before, though not issued in the "Home Journal" of New York until some time after Tennyson's book came out.
>
> This explanation is furnished so as to exonerate myself from an anticipated accusation of plagiarism of idea.[179]

Bridges' anxiety over possible comparisons to Tennyson is clearly felt through her meticulous detailing of the poems' publication dates and locations. However, Bridges' relative anonymity in her time appears to have resulted in far fewer accusations of plagiarising Tennyson's *Idylls* than she had anticipated. Only two reviewers appear to have given her volume significant notice, one from America and one from Britain. The American reviewer, though praising Bridges' Arthurian volume as "true poetry", urged her to leave Arthur buried, turn her talents to an American epic, and take her place amongst the country's elite poetesses. The British reviewer likewise found Bridges' volume to be "a book of true and glowing poetry", though they could not help but notice that her work bore "a singular

[179] Sallie Bridges, *Marble Isle: Legends of the Round Table and Other Poems* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1864), 158.

resemblance to that admired production of the Poet Laureate."[180] Therefore, while Bridges' poetic talents were praised, her Arthurian subject matter was all too familiar, and so of little interest to a wider readership.

While Bridges is keen to distance herself from Tennyson, she at the same time declares the principal source of her Arthurian cycle to be "the old romance of 'Prince Arthur,' translated from the French"—Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*. Despite Bridges' relative obscurity in the present day, her adaptation of Malory remains a significant achievement within the American Arthurian tradition. As Daniel Herbert points out, Bridges was "the first American author of either sex to truly *adapt* and *interpret* Malory's text as a comprehensive literary enterprise."[181] Bridges' cycle is composed of fourteen poems spanning the more or less complete story of Malory's Arthur, from his pulling of the sword in the stone in *Excalibur* to his final rest in Bridges' most original Arthurian poem *Avilion*. Similar to Tennyson, Bridges discovered by way of Malory a medium through which she could comment on current social interests. One of Bridges' principal concerns regarding her era was the relationship between men and women, and so it is unsurprising that she chose the story of Merlin and Vivien as one of her *Legends*.

One of "the first six" Arthurian poems Bridges published in 1857, *Merlin's Grave* is by and large a conventional retelling of Malory's entrapment narrative: the Ladye of the Lake's beauty causes Merlin to fall into an amorous dotage; she exploits his love to gain his knowledge; and, finally having grown weary of the old wizard, she entombs him within a stone cavern. Yet in a departure from Malory's narrative, Bridges' Ladye incurs a desolate punishment for her wicked deed. As the poem sombrely closes, "forever kept the Ladye the

[180] "Literary Intelligences and Notes on New Books," *United States Service Magazine* 2, no. 6 (December 1864): 571; "Marble Isle, Legends of the Round Table, and other Poems," *London Quarterly Review* 27, no. 53 (October 1866): 248.
[181] Daniel Helbert, "Malory in America" in *A New Companion to Malory*, ed. Megan G. Leitch and Cory James Rushton (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2019), 306; emphasis in original.

secret of the stone, / As she sat beneath the waters and wrought her spell alone."[182] While Malory's Nynive is the foundation of Bridges' Ladye, as with Buchanan's Viviane, there remain subtle resonances of Tennyson's Vivien. Alan and Barbara Tepa Lupack have highlighted how Bridges' aphoristic lines convey the poem's essential moral: "ladies laugh at lovers gray-bearded and three-score."[183] Tennyson's Vivien speaks many such aphorisms to Merlin, most prominently in the section known as "Vivien's Song":

> Faith and unfaith can ne'er be equal powers:
> Unfaith in aught is want of faith in all.[184]

This parallel use of aphorism suggests that Bridges' Ladye and Tennyson's Vivien each possess a keenly objective eye, with both displaying an unusual tendency to "see the forest for the trees" where others, particularly Merlin, cannot. However, this shared expansive vision ultimately leaves both enchantresses isolated—Bridges' Ladye works her spell alone in her cave and Tennyson's Vivien exists as a foreign presence in Arthur's court. But where Bridges and Tennyson exhibit a similar contradictive sentimentality in simultaneously demonising *and* pitying their lonely enchantresses, neither the Ladye nor Vivien appear to consider their isolation as a tragic punishment.

Though Buchanan and Bridges shared similar worries about the reception of their Arthurian volumes beside Tennyson's *Idylls*, if both authors are to be taken at their word, many of the similarities between their enchantress and Tennyson's Vivien appear to be coincidental. However, given that Buchanan and Bridges sourced their enchantresses from many of the same volumes that informed Tennyson's Vivien, it can plausibly be surmised that any similarities between the enchantresses simply manifest as natural convergences of character derived in nineteenth-century Britain and America from Malory's Nynive and the

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[182] Sallie Bridges, *Merlin's Grave* in *Marble Isle: Legends of the Round Table and Other Poems* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1864), 171.
[183] Alan Lupack and Barbara Tepa Lupack, *King Arthur in America* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1999), 15; Bridges, *Merlin's Grave*, 170.
[184] *MV*, 386-387.

Estoire's Viviane. Regardless, Tennyson's popularity ensured that his Vivien would stand above all the rest in the years to come.

During their first decade in print, Tennyson's *Idylls* was as likely to inspire unperturbed imitators as it was to produce apprehensive forewords rejecting their influence. The most fervent imitators, including Swinburne's antagonist, Robert Williams Buchanan (1841-1901)—not to be confused with Robert Buchanan (1785-1873) discussed above—flocked to Vivien. As highlighted in the introduction to this study, Williams Buchanan held Tennyson's *Vivien* in particularly high regard. He considered Tennyson's enchantress to be a supreme display of sensualist art tempered by tacit intellectual and moral concerns. Though Williams Buchanan's invective against Swinburne and his friends is perhaps his most famous invocation of Tennyson's Vivien, it was not the first time he had expressed his interest in the character. Seven years before the quarrel erupted, in 1864 Williams Buchanan published a pair of pendant poems entitled *Merlin and the White Death* and *Una, the Moon Fay; or, the Vision of Chastity* in the popular London magazine *Once a Week*. Both poems tell similar tales of fatal Arthurian enchantresses who display clear characteristic parallels to Tennyson's Vivien.

Merlin and the White Death was the first of the two poems to appear in February 1864. Narrated by Merlin in the first person, the poem somewhat inverts the narrative of Tennyson's *Vivien* and tells of the wizard's quest to seek out Uniun, Williams Buchanan's name for the mystical Lady of the Lake. Uniun is known throughout the land as an extremely powerful witch who enchants all who go in search for her and keeps her victims in a deep slumber within a subaquatic cave. As Merlin recounts, he had hoped to make Uniun love him and thereby acquire the knowledge to break her enchantments and free the knights of the realm, as well as obtain youth and beauty for himself. However, when he finally encounters Uniun, she proves more powerful and enigmatic than he expected.

Williams Buchanan's poem is defined by Merlin's evolving perception of Uniun. which develops in three distinct stages. Prior to meeting Uniun, Merlin first imagines her as a particularly sinister figure, "a demon's awful daughter" who lives in a "weed-hung cave" and wears an "oozy" white dress with a pale, bloodless complexion to match. This witch image soon morphs into a vision of Tennyson's Vivien as Uniun's physical features are described in serpentine terms:

> Supple her boneless limbs as snakes,
> . . . .
> And strange as eyes of serpents are
> Her haunting eyes . . . .[185]

A more striking Tennysonian chord then reverberates as Merlin describes her "charm" in terms evocative of the fallen Victorian prostitute:

> Knight after knight had thither gone [to her],
> Led by fierce impulse plunging on
> To something that he loved with dread,
> And each in turn to be conquerëd

Echoing Merlin's belittling cry of "harlot" against Vivien in Tennyson, Williams Buchanan's Merlin pronounces Uniun a "pale syren . . . / Whom all men fear!"[186] Merlin's initial fear of Uniun is further stoked by the grotesque aesthetic of her aquatic domain, seemingly analogous to the grimy back alleys of Victorian London,

> Slimed with water-snakes, huge-leaved
> And monstrous, floating scores on scores,
> With fire-sparks burning in their cores—
> Like eyes of flame . . . .
> Afar across the lake there passed
> Great shadows, multiform and vast,
> That with low murmurs went and came;
> And crawling things, stingless and tame,
> Came creeping thick and fast . . .

[185] Robert Williams Buchanan, *Merlin and the White Death, Once a Week* 10, no. 243 (February 20, 1864): 251.
[186] Ibid., 251.

Despite finding himself frozen on the water's edge, Merlin musters up the courage to break the fearful silence and calls out to her, the newly named "Phantom of the Lake."[187]

The second stage in the development of Merlin's perception of Uniun commences with their physical interaction. Once in her presence, Merlin's ignorant fear is replaced by a sublime terror. As he recounts, having heard his "Phantom" call,

> She rose before me to the waist,
> What time bright silver snakes embraced
> Her arms and neck, and lilies white
> Throbbed to her sides with veins of light;
> The pale moon, trembling overhead,
> Slow widen'd like a flower, and shed
> Peace on the place;
> And, one by one, peept stars that grew
> To silver leaf, and sparkled dew,
> Shedding a sweetness strange to trace
> Upon the Witch's bloodless face . . . .[188]

Merlin attempts to protect himself from Uniun's cosmos-bending influence, illuminated by the moon and stars, and, mimicking Tennyson's Vivien, stands before her "weaving spells and waving arms".[189] However, his efforts are unsuccessful. Uniun simply smiles at him as if a mere child and unveils a set of brilliant golden wings that bring him to tears, completely shattering his preconception of her. The second stage of Merlin's perception of Uniun is therefore a Socratic realization that he knows little if anything about her at all.

The final stage of Merlin's developing perception of Uniun encompasses his understanding what she really is through contemplation. Sensing that Merlin aims to plot against her, Uniun sends him back to Camelot with a warning:

> I seek not those who love me not;
> Nor, til due time, can mortal gaze
> Behold how fair I am, and praise
> My matchless beauty at its worth[190]

[187] Ibid., 252.
[188] Ibid., 252.
[189] Ibid., 252.
[190] Ibid., 252.

Merlin heeds Uniun's warning and returns to Camelot stripped of his pride. However, his newfound understanding of "the white glory of her face" continues to haunt him, and he desires

> At last to join that white-robed throng,
> Who sweetly sleep,
> Watched ever by the peerless one

Merlin comes to realise that those under Uniun's thrall are not cursed but privileged. They slumber patiently awaiting the day they might hear her call and open their eyes to gaze upon her true identity as "the Angel of the Lake."[191] Thus, where fear first made Uniun a Phantom, knowledge recovered the Lady, and wisdom ultimately revealed the Angel.

Uniun represents the first significant example of an author adopting narrative and character elements from Tennyson's Vivien to reimagine the enchantress and her role within Arthurian legend. Williams Buchanan would continue his development of the Vivien character, albeit more subtly, in *Una, the Moon-Fay; or, the Vision of Chastity*. Appearing in September 1864, Una can be read as Uniun's witch-sister. Like *Merlin and the White Death*, Williams Buchanan's second poem is a first-person recollection of an encounter with Una from the perspective of a knight called Tristem. One day when returning home alone from battle, Tristem is attacked by three bandits who leave him for dead on the road. Falling into a swoon, he dreams of a beautiful woman who wears a horned moon above her brow and soon identifies her as Una, Lady of the Wood. Similar to Uniun, she appears ethereal, made of neither "flesh nor blood nor bone." She possesses yellow-gold hair and "haunting eyes", while her white dress makes her shine like the moon.[192] Tristem dreams that Una heals his wound and miraculously awakens to find he is free from pain. All day he searches for Una in the real world and is dismayed when she is nowhere to be found. He comes to rest under a

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[191] Ibid., 252.
[192] Robert Williams Buchanan, *Una, the Moon-Fay; or, the Vision of Chastity*, *Once a Week* 11, no. 274 (September 24, 1864): 376.

tree when suddenly a sharp pain runs through his head and the vision of Una reappears. "With agony of wild delight," Tristem runs to embrace her and falls again in dismay when he finds that she is intangible. Echoing the lyrics of Tennyson's *Vivien*, he claims to love her

> more than men or fame,
> More than my hope of paradise,
> More than my own great name . . . .[193]

Una tells him that all men who meet her are cursed to hate all love but love for her, however, Tristem is the first she has loved in return. Yet despite their reciprocated love, she reveals that they can never truly be together until he is "purged of clay" and free from his mortal shackles.[194] With no way to renounce his physical body, Tristem is resigned to an unfulfilling life with only the mere memory of Una to accompany him.

Una is not the vibrant avatar of Tennyson's Vivien that Uniun is. A witch she may be, but unlike her sister she possesses none of Vivien's threatening demeanour—there is more of fairy than demon about her. Yet as a pendant to Uniun she works towards completing Williams Buchanan's adapted vision of Tennyson's enchantress. By far the most important of Willams Buchanan's developments of Vivien, he endows his witches with epistemic limits: Una cannot truly be known to Tristem in the physical realm just as Uniun cannot truly be known in Merlin's mind. Both enchantresses are therefore comparably defined by an essential inability to be wholly understood by anyone but themselves. Williams Buchanan's unified idea of the Vivien-character as fundamentally unknowable is significant in that it represents the initial development of an esoteric dynamism that would define the most psychologically complex adaptations of Tennyson's Vivien in Arthurian literature in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, particularly the enchantresses found in the literature of Edwin Arlington Robinson, Dion Fortune, and John Cowper Powys.

[193] Ibid., 377.
[194] Ibid., 377.

The most faithful adaptation of Tennyson's Vivien during her first decade can be found in the anonymously published poem, *The Temptation of Arthur* (1870), also published in *Once a Week*. Building on one of Tennyson's most original narrative sections in *Vivien*, the *Temptation* examines Vivien's attempted seduction of Arthur:

> For once, when Arthur walking all alone,
> Vext at a rumour issued from [Vivien] herself
> Of some corruption crept among his knights,
> Had met her, Vivien, being greeted fair,
> Would fain have wrought upon his cloudy mood
> With reverent eyes mock-loyal, shaken voice,
> And fluttered adoration, and at last
> With dark sweet hints of some who prized him more
> Than who should prize him most; at which the King
> Had gazed upon her blankly and gone by:
> But one had watched, and had not held his peace:
> It made the laughter of an afternoon
> That Vivien should attempt the blameless King.[195]

In Tennyson's idyll, Vivien fatefully turns her attention towards Merlin after having failed to seduce Arthur. Though undoubtedly inspired by this scene, the *Temptation* takes liberty with the characterisations of Arthur and Vivien and the circumstances under which they meet to create an adaption of Tennyson's enchantress that is simultaneously faithful and unique.

The *Temptation* opens on Arthur walking through a woodland and musing on a strange dream from the night before. The dream, in which he was haunted by sorrowful voices and veiled shadow forms, has left him in a Ulyssean state, depressed and longing to partake in "glorious deeds". As if by fate, Arthur hears the call of a bird, or "some rare spirit poising like a lark," beckoning him onwards towards such a deed which would "ennoble all [the] Table Round" and make him the most celebrated of knights.[196] Following the bird's song through the forest, he discovers a weeping maid sitting upon a fallen tree. Wary of his presence, the maid asks Arthur:

> "O Art thou one of those who yester-eve

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[195] *MV*, 150-162.
[196] *The Temptation of Arthur*, *Once a Week* 5, no. 110 (February 5, 1870): 8.

Slew my dear father and my brethren seven,
And wasted all our lands with fire and sword?"[197]

He sidesteps her question but promises to aid her in her quest of first rescuing her sisters who are being held captive by rogue knights in her father's castle and then leading her to sanctuary with Guinevere. As they ride on, Arthur increasingly notices how peculiar the maid appears and becomes transfixed on her eyes, which look rather like stars within the evening mist and fill him with both wonder and doubt. Rebuffing his curiosity, she anxiously directs him towards a clearing in the distance where she claims her father's castle resides.

It is at this point in the poem where echoes of Tennyson's idyll begin to manifest explicitly. Out of nowhere, a violent tempest arises, and, as Vivien seeks shelter in Merlin's embrace in Tennyson's idyll, the maid rushes into Arthur's arms:

Close to his face he felt her tangled hair
In snake-like folds twining around his neck,
While wan as wintry dawn did seem his face.
Then, when a hollow gust swept down the gorge,
Moaning and mocking like a thing of sin,
In melancholy mood she crept to him,
And hid her cold face close to his, and looked
Into his wildered eyes, and clung to him
And "Arthur!" cried, and all the mountain sides
Echoed "Arthur!"[198]

As in Tennyson, the *Temptation*'s storm is sexually charged, and similar language and imagery is used to create an effect of sexual passion; the maid is wet and dishevelled, she clings to the King suggestively, and the moaning of the wind echoes her own cries of "Arthur!"[199] Having survived the storm, the maid beckons Arthur to their destination. Finding

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[197] Ibid., 9.
[198] Ibid., 10.
[199] C.p. *MV*, 943-960:

[she] clung to him and hugged him close;
. . . .
She shook from fear, and for her fault she wept
Of petulancy; she called him lord and liege,
Her seer, her bard, her silver star of eve,
Her God, her Merlin, the one passionate love
Of her whole life; and ever overhead

nothing but a little wood nestled in a valley, Arthur realises that he has been tricked. The maid professes her love for him and her desire that he remain in her woodland dwelling. Finally realizing who she is, Arthur criticises the maid's guile:

> "Woman with flame-like hair and lustful eyes,
> Thy pretty syllables and dainty smiles,
> Nought heed I; for I know now who thou art.
> Not many moons have spent their mellow strength
> Since by such arts as thine was Merlin trapped;
> But, know thou that I am not one of those
> Whose passions are their masters, not their serfs;
> Soft arms and speechful eyes and rosy lips
> I hold as nothing; therefore let me go!"[200]

Arthur's disapproval of the maid, all but named Vivien, simultaneously echoes the spiteful tone of Tennyson's Merlin who deems Vivien a mere "face-flatterer and backbiter" and the coldness of his passionless King who scorns "the giddy pleasure of the eyes."[201] The maid-Vivien attempts to assuage Arthur's anger with kisses and "honeyed words" despite his protests. Her advances inspire the King to speak another Tennysonesque invective against lust:

> "Thy tender voice I hear
> Sounding like whispers from the underworld;
> Thy eyes of flame my weary senses pierce;
> Thy snake-like tresses coil around my neck;
> Upon my parched lips hot kisses fall;
> And soft arms fold me in a fond embrace:--
> But not thy gleeful words, thy eyes of flame,
> Nor tangled hair which coils around my neck,
> Nor kisses hot, nor arms which fondly twine,
> Can make me break mine all-accustomed vows;
> For I am cold as stone, and cannot melt
> Before the white heat of a woman's love.
>
> *　*　*　*　*　*

> Bellowed the tempest, and the rotten branch
> Snapt in the rushing of the river-rain
> Above them; and in change of glare and gloom
> Her eyes and neck glittering went and came;
> Till now the storm, its burst of passion spent,
> Moaning and calling out of other lands . . .

[200] *Temptation*, 10.
[201] *MV*, 822; *PA*, 296.

> And thou wilt give me all these wondrous woods,
> And make me lord of many tables round!
> O wily snakes, that show your speckled sides,
> Ye are not wily as a woman's tongue!”[202]

Just as Merlin’s likening of Vivien to a harlot in Tennyson’s idyll turns her face into a “bare grinning skeleton of death”, Arthur’s words likewise cause the maid-Vivien to grow deathly pale and cold.[203] As a final nod to the ending of Tennyson’s idyll, and mimicking Vivien’s cry of “Fool!”:

> [The maid] thrust him from her, while with stony eyes
> She gazed at him; then, hissing through closed
> teeth,
> “Fool!” turned away and fled among the woods.[204]

With the maid-Vivien gone, Arthur, having aimlessly cried out for help, is miraculously rescued by Sir Tristram and the Lady of the Lake and brought safely back to Camelot.

The final dramatic flurry of the *Temptation of Arthur* leaves little doubt that Tennyson’s *Vivien* was the principal inspiration behind the poem. By the end of their tumultuous run-in, Arthur has become a pathetic amalgamation of Tennyson’s Arthur and Merlin, and the maid-Vivien has assumed an almost identical devious visage to the Tennyson’s enchantress. The most telling sign of Tennyson’s influence is the pervasive sexual tension that exists between the maid-Vivien and Arthur. As in Tennyson’s idyll, this tension is inflated by the orgasmic description of the storm and the deeply sensual serpentine descriptions of the maid-Vivien’s body as she caresses Arthur. The *Temptation* therefore reinforces the perception of Vivien-as-harlot. Taking these parallels into account, the maid-Vivien is an adaptation of Tennyson’s Vivien in a similar sense to Tennyson’s own

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[202] *Temptation*, 10.
[203] *MV*, 845.
[204] *Temptation*, 11; c.p. *MV*, 970-972:

> And shrieking out “O fool!” the harlot leapt
> Adown the forest, and the thicket closed
> Behind her, and the forest echoed “fool.”

adaptation of Malory's Nynive: she is essentially the same character though her narrative has been greatly developed. Even so, the anonymously published maid-Vivien remains the most explicit development of Tennyson's Vivien during the enchantress's first decade in existence.

The similarities between the maid-Vivien of *The Temptation of Arthur* and the Vivien of Tennyson's *Idylls* raises once more the question of authenticity under the Laureate's shadow that was first expressed by Robert Buchanan and Sallie Bridges. This question of authenticity becomes even more provocative in the case of the *Temptation* considering that, unlike Buchanan or Bridges, the anonymous author largely copies and pastes Tennyson's Vivien into the poem. Unfortunately, the author's anonymity and the poem's lack of critical engagement means that any answers as to what drew the author to directly engage Tennyson's Vivien must remain speculative. What can be gleaned, however, is that any qualms the author may have held about publishing a direct descendant of Tennyson's enchantress the merits of the story evidently outweighed any plagiaristic or moralistic concerns.

During her first decade in print, Tennyson's Vivien was pushed away by authors of the Arthurian legend as frequently as she was embraced by them. Robert Buchanan and Sallie Bridges both denied her influence by attempting to distance themselves from Tennyson's Arthurian project as a whole, choosing instead to look towards the fatal enchantresses of Malory and the *Vulgate Estoire* for inspiration. On the other hand, Williams Buchanan and the anonymous author of *The Temptation of Arthur* saw in Tennyson's *Vivien* opportunities for psychological and narrative exposition. As such, Uniun, Una, and the maid-Vivien can be considered analogous starting points of the complex development of Tennyson's Vivien that continued well into the twentieth century.

II. Vivien Burlesqued

The immense popularity of Tennyson's *Idylls*, particularly between the period of 1860 and 1890, led many authors to produce imitations of his epic. One of the most pervasive types of imitation was parody. Beyond the *Idylls*, both Tennyson and his work were the target of so many parodies over his lifetime (and for many years after) that George O. Marshall, Jr. claims "perhaps no other English poet has been the subject of as many parodies and jests as has Tennyson."[205] For a time, it seemed like everyone wanted to take a shot at the Laureate, from anonymous amateurs who caricatured him as the prideful *Baron Alfred Vere de Vere* (1883) to Victorian literary giants including Swinburne and Lewis Carroll who respectively took aim at Tennyson's high-minded rhetoric in *The Higher Pantheism in a Nutshell* (1877) and *The Three Voices* (1869).

As one of Tennyson's most influential works, *The Idylls of the King* were a prime target for parodists in Britain as well as America. As the Lupacks note, "on both sides of the Atlantic, there were those who found the British laureate's [Arthurian] poems too pompous and his moralizing too tempting a target."[206] As Roger Simpson has shown, in Britain, the popular magazine *Punch* satirised the *Idylls* through cartoons and verse, presenting "British parliamentary politics as ironic commentary on the 'coming,' 'morte,' and 'return' of Arthurian story."[207] Gerard Manley Hopkins thought a more fitting title for Tennyson's epic would have been "*Charades from the Middle Ages* (dedicated by permission to H.R.H., etc.)", while Swinburne was wont to fire off jabs at the conservativism underscoring

[205] George O. Marshall, Jr., *Tennyson in Parody and Jest: An Essay and a Selection* (Lincoln: The Tennyson Society, 1975), 5.
[206] Lupack and Lupack, *King Arthur in America*, 35.
[207] Roger Simpson, "King Arthur at the *Punch* Round Table, 1859-1914," *Arthuriana* 9, no. 4 (Winter 1999): 94.

Tennyson's epic, which he retitled *The Morte d'Albert, or the Idylls of the Prince Consort*.[208] Swinburne's *Tristram of Lyonesse* (1882) was also written in part as a response to what he saw as Tennyson's ignoble treatment of the love affair between Tristan and Isolt in *The Last Tournament*. The *Idylls* received a similar satirical treatment towards the end of the century in America, where the crowning achievement of parody was undoubtedly Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889), which pokes fun at the anachronistic chivalric values contained in Tennyson's Arthurian poems. Many nineteenth-century parodists focused on principal characters like Arthur and Guinevere, and so Tennyson's Vivien received only a minor share of the poet's wider satirical treatment. But just as Tennyson's excessive moralizing made him a popular target of jest, Vivien's overtly immoral character made her a potentially lucrative subject to make light of. It should be noted that while parodies of Tennyson's Vivien do not represent a significant step in the broader nineteenth- and twentieth-century development of the character, they nonetheless shine a light on the pervasiveness of Vivien in Anglo-American literature and social discourse.

The first parody of Tennyson's Vivien can be found in Samuel Orchart Beeton's poem *Vilien* (1873). A successful publisher in Victorian London, Beeton is remembered for launching several publications aimed at character building, including *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* (1852-1879), the highly influential *Boy's Own Magazine* (1855-1890), and *Mrs Beeton's Book of Household Management* (1861), edited by his wife, Isabella. Beeton also found success through his *Christmas Annual* magazine, which notably introduced Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes to the world in 1887 with the publishing of *A Study in Scarlet*. It is in *Beeton's Christmas Annual* that *Vilien* first appeared as part of Beeton's mock epic, *The Coming K—: A Set of Idyll Lays*.

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[208] Gerard Manley Hopkins to R. W. Dixon, 27 February 1879, in *Tennyson: the Critical Heritage*, ed. John D. Jump (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 334; Algernon Charles Swinburne, "Tennyson and Musset," *Fortnightly Review* 29, no. 170 (February 1881): 146.

Set in contemporary Victorian London, Beeton's parody of Tennyson's *Idylls* follows the exploits of the ridiculous and exceptionally unchivalric Guelpho (the Coming K—) and his Dinner-Table Knights. Each poem in the volume is a burlesque of each of the *Idylls* published through 1872, including *Heraint and Shenid*, *Vilien*, *Loosealot and Delaine, Goanveer*, *The Last Carnival*, and *The Glass of Ale*. Although *The Coming K—* experienced some popularity, it was not well received by critics. One scathing review of the volume noted:

> "The Coming K—" consists of stupid parodies upon the "Idylls of the King," exhibiting the grossest bad taste and the blankest of blank verse, and teems with vulgarity which we should have expected that the publishers would have shrunk from giving the world . . . . Parodies are only tolerable when they are the work of consummate wit; and of even the faintest shadow of borrowed humour this writer is wholly destitute.[209]

Another claimed that due to the volume's vulgarity, Albert Edward, the Prince of Wales—the possible target of the parody—attempted to have the subsequent publishing of the standalone collection of the poems suppressed, though this venture evidently failed.[210]

A caricature of Tennyson's Vivien appears in the eponymous poem *Vilien*, where she is styled as a flirtatious maid who catches the eye of the wizard Herlin. The poem takes excessive liberties with Tennyson's *Vivien* with respect to plot and characterization. Herlin is not at all the sage kingmaker of Arthurian tradition but a charlatan and a conjurer of party tricks—producing bowls of goldfish from beneath his coat and telling fraudulent fortunes. Despite his sham magical practices, he remains "the most famous wizard of the day" and is soon summoned to perform at Guelpho's court at London.[211] Herlin's skill draws the attention of the pretty Vilien and the wizard quickly develops a strong attraction towards her and makes her his stagehand. Alluding to Tennyson's poem, Vilien one day comes across a

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[209] Free Lance, "The Talk of the Town," *London Society: An Illustrated Magazine of Light and Amusing Literature for the Hours of Relaxation* 23, no. 135 (March 1873): 287.
[210] "Foreign Notes," *Every Saturday: A Journal of Choice Reading* 3, no. 18 (May 3, 1873): 504.
[211] Samuel Orchart Beeton, *Vilien* in *The Coming K—: A Set of Idyll Lays* (London, 1873), 57-58.

noticeably upset Guelpho and mimicking Vivien's "saucy eyes, mock-loyal, and pitying voice" asks the Coming K— what it is that troubles him.[212] Guelpho expresses to her his desire to learn the Herlin's most closely guarded secret: a magic trick by which he mysteriously makes a table rap and stand on end. With apparently no motive of her own, Vilien agrees to help him obtain it and goes in search of the wizard. Having tracked down Herlin in a nearby town, Vilien learns that he is to perform that very night at the Town Hall. Later at the venue, Herlin discloses to her that he left Guelpho's court because of financial troubles and expresses his concern over her sudden appearance in terms reminiscent of Merlin's prophecy in Tennyson:

> you followed me unask'd
> And when I looked and saw you in the hall
> I felt first annoyed. To tell the truth,
> I feared you would with business interfere,
> And sweep me from my hold up the world,
> And spoil my name and fame . . . .[213]

Ignoring the wizard's attempts to be rid of her, Vilien continues to pester him about his special trick. Herlin only acquiesces after she saves him from being trampled by a raucous crowd demanding their money back from his unsuccessful show. As a reward, Herlin reveals to Vilien that the trick depends entirely upon a flick of the wrist—the rest, he says, is all "humbug". Furious at this revelation, Vilien decrees that she has been "sold" and rushes to back home to London all the while muttering the Tennysonian cry of "O, fool!"[214] Back in

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[212] Ibid., 62.

[213] Ibid., 69; *MV*, 296-302:

> You followed me unasked;
> And when I looked, and saw you following still,
> My mind involved yourself the nearest thing
> In that mind-mist: for shall I tell you truth?
> You seemed that wave about to break upon me
> And sweep me from my hold upon the world,
> My use and name and fame. . . .

[214] Beeton, *Vilien*, 81.

London, Guelpho shuns Vilien and only "thinks of how they two were sold, / And how the wizard proved too much for them."[215]

As the early criticism of *The Coming K—* suggests, there is a lack of comedic intelligence that muddles the intended meaning of Beeton's mock epic and Vilien's role in it. It has been suggested that Vilien's obsession with Herlin's table rapping trick may be a jab at the late-Victorian craze for spiritualism and séances.[216] But the poem also has a broader interest in putting Tennyson's chivalric ideals at odds with Victorian consumer trends. The moral didacticism of Tennyson's idyll is set aside and replaced by a rather impotent criticism of Victorian Britain's material culture and the potential perils of an amoral marketplace where strategic deception can lead to a full pocket. In this Beeton may have been poking fun at himself and others like him: prolific publishers and authors adept at navigating an increasingly competitive marketplace and creatively leading consumers, like the foolish Vilien, towards their own product.

With respect to Tennyson's Vivien, Vilien is a lifeless caricature. Though she possesses the hallmark flirtatiousness of Tennyson's enchantress, she inherits none of her vital motivation or sharp wit. Where Vivien aims to bring Arthur's kingdom to its knees, Vilien seems content to play a bit part in Guelpho's court, agreeing to help the Coming K— obtain Herlin's secret though there is apparently no benefit in it for her. Vilien's dullness is further emphasised by her lazy appropriation of Vivien's most famous lines. Compared to "Vivien's Song", Vilien's "song" is utterly nonsensical and amounts to little more than juvenile wordplay.[217] Indeed, most, if not all, of the passages that are derived from

[215] Ibid., 82.
[216] Walter Hamilton, *Parodies of the Works of English & American Authors*, vol. 1 (London: Reeves and Turner, 1884), 34.
[217] Beeton, *Vilien*, 72-73;

> In love, 'tis as in trade; if trade were ours,
> Credit and cash could ne'er be equal powers :
> Give trust to all or don't give trust at all.

Tennyson's Vivien are essentially ineffective and do nothing to challenge the poetic merits or symbolic meanings of the originals. Vilien is a character who, unlike Vivien, is capable of being easily bought and sold because she is aimless and inauthentic. She is a stereotypical nineteenth-century consumer who is product-driven and who uses her womanly charm as well as her money to get what she wants. Her singular purpose is to drive the entertainment value of *The Coming K—* as a whole. Beeton's vacant parody of Tennyson's Vivien speaks to the general shortcomings of *The Coming K—* and suggests that he may have published such a parody of Tennyson—as he did parodies of Homer, Byron, and Shakespeare—to simply sell more copies of his books and magazines.

A minor flourish of parodies of Tennyson's Vivien cropped up in America beginning in 1885 with Edgar Fawcett's *The New King Arthur: An Opera without Music*. A prolific author, Fawcett produced many social satires aimed at the high society of his native New York City. In the *New King Arthur*, he turns his attention towards what he considers the high-nosed principles touted by the *Idylls*, and opens with a dedicatory jest directed squarely at Tennyson:

> Take, Alfred, this mellifluous verse of mine,
> Nor rank too high the honor I bestow,
> Howe'er it thrill thy soul with grateful pride.
> For thou hast sung of Arthur and his knights,
> And thou hast told of deeds that they have done,
> And thou hast told of loves that they have loved,
> And thou hast told of sins that they have sinned,

It is the little rift within the lute
That cracks the sound and makes the music mute,
And leaves the banjo nothing worth at all.

It is the little moth within the suit,
It is the merry maggot in the fruit,
That worming surely, slowly ruins all.

It is the little leaven makes the lump,
It is the little piston works the pump ;
And A-L-L spells ALL, and all is all.

> And I have sung in my way, thou in thine.
> I think my way superior to thine,
> Yes, Alfred, yes, in loyal faith I do;
> But if I do I may be right or wrong;
> And whether right or wrong, what matters it?
> For shall not swans be swans, though geese are geese?
> And if our swans be geese yet swans are deemed,
> The merrier for ourselves that deem them swans.
> So, take my verses, Alfred, nor with shame
> Too deeply blush, as when we gain a boon
> So precious that we know 'tis undeserved.
> For thou has very creditably sung
> Of Arthur, if we judge thee all-in-all;
> And I, if I more creditably sing,
> Can help it not; but let us live our lives.[218]

Though the dedication proves just as silly as the rest of *The New King Arthur*, Fawcett's echo of "all-in-all" cleverly suggests Vivien's integral role in his satire.

The New King Arthur portrays Camelot as morally bankrupt and beset by plots to steal power and gain beauty. Lancelot dreams of being king in his own land and enlists Guinevere to help him steal Excalibur. She is at first reluctant to help him, but Lancelot persuades her by promising to obtain two fabled beauty products in Merlin's possession: a face wash capable of lending her complexion a "pearlier beauty than of mortal tint" and a hair dye that can "stain each silken strand / Of those rich tresses into sunnier sheen".[219] Merlin overhears Lancelot and Guinevere's plot and only agrees to help them when Lancelot offers him the position of Prime Minister in his new government. The treachery continues as Lancelot and Merlin's bargain is overheard by Modred and Vivien. Like Lancelot, Modred desires to wrest power from Arthur and take the seat on Camelot's throne. As Lancelot enlists Guinevere to help steal Excalibur, Modred calls upon Vivien to aid him in stealing the sword from Lancelot. Vivien is also at first reluctant to join Modred's scheme, largely because she abhors the idea of becoming his Queen, but she is soon persuaded by the idea of obtaining

[218] Edgar Fawcett, *The New King Arthur: An Opera without Music* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1885), iii-iv.
[219] Ibid., 32.

Merlin's beauty products to live out her own fantasy; Vivien, a brunette, is in love with the egomaniacal Galahad, who, reveals to her that he is only interested in blondes. Caring little for Modred's plot, and with a minor nod to Tennyson's idyll, Vivien goes straight to Merlin and attempts to gain the beauty products through flattery of his admirable "patriarchal beard".[220] Galahad overhears Vivien's admiration of Merlin and immediately accuses her of indecency, to which she pleads her innocence. The ensuing argument draws a drunken Arthur into their path, as well as Lancelot and Guinevere. Threatening to unravel their schemes, Arthur is only persuaded to leave by the sound of singing partygoers within the castle. Soon after, Lancelot's initial plot is set in motion and Guinevere emerges from a vault beneath the castle with Excalibur in hand, only to have it immediately stolen by a cloaked figure. The commotion draws Arthur back outside and the hooded thief reveals himself to be none other than the king's fool, Dagonet, who, upon learning of the various plots to steal Excalibur, stole the sword to keep it safe. Sensing clemency in unity, the plotters easily convince Arthur that Dagonet speaks falsely, and the fool is subsequently thrown in prison while the rest shamelessly return to the party.

Of all Fawcett's burlesques of Tennyson's characters, Vivien is the most complex. Where characters like Arthur and Galahad can easily be defined by their respective prideful drunkenness and excessive narcissism, or Lancelot and Modred by their abject lust for power, Vivien fits no particular profile. While Fawcett, like Tennyson, implicates Vivien as one of the principal plotters against Arthur, there is an essential difference in each Vivien's motivation; Tennyson's Vivien is driven by her hatred of all Camelot and Fawcett's Vivien by a singular love for Galahad, or the "mortal dream" of love which Tennyson's Vivien never experiences. Though noble this drive may seem, even to someone such as Tennyson, the irony of Vivien's love for Galahad is that, in a similar sense to Elaine's love for Lancelot in

[220] Ibid., 126.

the *Idylls*, it is aimed at someone who is inherently ignoble. Labelled by Merlin as a "lily undefiled", Galahad proudly claims to love only himself and virtue which to him are conveniently "one" entity.[221] Vivien's love is further stifled in Galahad's eyes by her unfortunate existence as a brunette rather than the angelic "Early-English blonde" he has envisioned.[222] As Vivien is motivated by love alone, she might very well have been the most respectable person in Fawcett's Camelot—if only, as Galahad laments, "She might have been a blonde!"[223]

Echoing Beeton's *Coming K—*, *The New King Arthur* replaces the *Idylls*'s ethical narrative with an "unseemly" narrative of nineteenth-century Western consumerism.[224] In particular, Fawcett plays on the theme of sexually dichotomous consumer practices through the symbols of Excalibur and Merlin's beauty products. Excalibur appears to symbolise masculine power and the buying and selling of that power from one man to another. The face-wash and the hair-dye likewise seem suggestive of a stereotypical female desire not only for material possession but the aesthetic allurement that they promise. Driven to obtain these beauty products, Fawcett's Vivien is therefore both a victim and a perpetuator of the consumerist quest for personal and social gain, and it is her desire to make such gains that brings her closest to Tennyson's Vivien who craves Merlin's "use and name and fame." So while *The New King Arthur*'s Vivien perhaps warrants more sympathy from the reader through her genuine love for Galahad, in the end she is as much of an unprincipled materialist as anyone in Fawcett's Camelot.

Placed beside Beeton's Vilien, Fawcett's Vivien is the more successful parody of Tennyson's enchantress. What particularly stands out is Fawcett's portrayal of Vivien as feeling at home amongst Arthur's imperfect court. While Tennyson seeks to position his

[221] Ibid., 69, 127.
[222] Ibid., 77.
[223] Ibid., 162.
[224] Ibid., 114.

unethical Vivien firmly at odds with Arthur's chivalric order, Fawcett admits more plainly that Arthur's severely flawed kingdom makes it a more sympathetic environment to someone like Vivien. The added irony of Vivien as the paragon of love in Fawcett's story and Arthur as the hedonist king only serves to blur the ethical distinction Tennyson worked so hard to cultivate in the *Idylls*. Despite his promising take on Vivien, Fawcett's cleverness seems to have failed him most everywhere else in his music-less opera as *The New King Arthur* never managed to clip the swan-like wings of Tennyson's *Idylls*. It was largely panned by critics as hollow, tedious, and a waste of Fawcett's ability, and was as quick to go out of fashion as Vivien was with Galahad.[225]

The second parody of Tennyson's Vivien to appear in quick succession in America came in Oscar Fay Adams's *Thomas and Vivien* from his 1886 volume *Post-Laureate Idyls and Other Poems*. Adams composed a total of fourteen "idyls", with ten appearing in the *Post-Laureate Idyls* volume and four—in the spirit of Tennyson's serialisation of the *Idylls*—twenty years later in the volume *Sicut Patribus and Other Verse* (1906) as part of a sequence called *Post-Laureate Idyls, Second Series*. As Beverly Taylor and Elisabeth Brewer note, Adams's idyls "offer a pastiche of lines from the *Idylls* but tell original stories and introduce characters not in Tennyson's narratives".[226] Additionally, the Lupacks observe that "unlike Tennyson, whose poems focus on the exceptional and the extraordinary, Adams writes about that which is unexceptional and ordinary."[227] Simple in its style and narrative, *Thomas and Vivien* is like the rest of Adams's idyls framed by an "argument" derived from a nursery rhyme—in this instance, "Tom, Tom, the piper's son".[228] The idyl tells the tale of the

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[225] "Bismarck at Threescore and Ten," *The Critic: a Weekly Review of Literature and the Arts* 110 (February 6, 1886): 67; "Puck's Views and Reviews," *Puck* 19, no. 473 (March 31, 1886): 75; "Literary Notes," *The Art Amateur; A Monthly Journal Devoted to Art in the Household* 14, no. 3 (February 1886): 71.
[226] Beverly Taylor and Elisabeth Brewer, *The Return of King Arthur: British and American Arthurian Literature since 1800* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1983), 168.
[227] Lupack and Lupack, *King Arthur in America*, 39.
[228] Oscar Fay Adams, *Thomas and Vivien* in *Post-Laureate Idyls and Other Poems* (Boston: D. Lothrop and Company, 1886), 35.

mischievous Thomas, a young boy whose father, Sir Guy, counsels Arthur following Merlin's disappearance. Though Thomas is known throughout the kingdom as a delinquent, Sir Guy defends his son as merely a "black gosling" whose childish disobedience will eventually shape him into the finest of the court's "flock".[229] One morning, Thomas spies a sow and her young and chases down the smallest and most tender of the piglets intending to bring it to his friend, the palace cook. It chances that Vivien witnesses the theft through a lattice and

> because she loved to tell
> A tale, and more because the lad had been
> Full oft a torment to her, later went
> And told King Arthur what the son of Guy
> Had done . . . .[230]

Arthur believes Vivien's every word and, in agreement with Sir Guy, Thomas is sentenced to be striped at noon by Sir Kay. Following her triumph, Vivien sets herself upon the cook as she once did Merlin and uses her "wondrous woman's art" to discover the whereabouts of the stolen piglet.[231] Unaware of the rumours surrounding her, the cook finds Vivien to be as "innocently fair as Enid" and promises to bring her the cooked pig to her personal chambers,

> For breath of scandal soiling Vivien's name
> Had not so far as palace kitchen blown,
> And therefore deem'd he still the damsel pure.

At the stroke of noon, Vivien sits down to enjoy the stolen pig while in the streets below her "in direful anguish, rang the shrieks / Of Tom."[232]

Adams's parody of Tennyson's Vivien is more successful than either Beeton and company's or Fawcett's because, like Tennyson's adoption of Malory's Nynive, he does not aimlessly reinvent Vivien but rather builds on the fundamental Tennysonian details of her character. The result of Adams's parody is Tennyson's Vivien matured; so skilled is she in

[229] Ibid., 38.
[230] Ibid., 40.
[231] Ibid., 41.
[232] Ibid., 42-43.

her craft of deceit that, where Tennyson's Arthur gazes blankly at her, Adams's Arthur listens to her attentively, moreover "not doubting that for once / She spoke the truth" of Thomas's thievery.[233] Adams's maturation of Tennyson's enchantress can also be seen through his juxtaposition of Vivien against Thomas who, in a psychological sense, is essentially Tennyson's and Adams's Vivien unrefined. Thomas is roguish and independent like Vivien, and in the absence of a nurturing parental figure left like her to his "own wild will", yet he lacks her matured self-awareness and the nuances of her "wondrous woman's art" and is ultimately punished for his youthful ineptitude. And so, in a clever inverse of Tennyson's Merlin and Vivien, the young man proves powerless in the presence of the mature woman.

As tempting as it was in the nineteenth century to satirise Tennyson's Vivien, it was a risky endeavour that more often than not resulted in critical disappointment or complete disregard. Both Beeton's and Fawcett's works were panned largely because they lacked a certain comedic precision that contemporary critics believed was required to take such masterpieces as Tennyson's *Idylls* to task. Therefore, Beeton's spiritless Vilien and Fawcett's materialistic Vivien are largely empty critiques of Tennyson's Vivien, and both fail to make a lasting impression because they, like their authors, do not possess the cleverness that makes Tennyson's enchantress such a compelling character. On the other hand, Adams's parody is more successful precisely because he grants Vivien the unassailable wit that Tennyson instils in her. Adams does not deviate from the model of Tennyson's wily Vivien but brings her further into maturity. The result is a Vivien who has achieved the use and name and fame she sought in Tennyson's *Idylls*, but who has been ironically resigned to a mundane life wherein she works her magic on the most insignificant objects for the most absurd purposes. No matter how ridiculous Adams's Vivien appears in comparison to Tennyson's, she succeeds

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[233] Ibid., 40.

where her satirical contemporaries fall short in providing a compelling critique of Vivien's superficial drive to conquer and possess. While the parodies of Beeton, Fawcett, and Adams do not necessarily contribute to Vivien's growing complexity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, they nevertheless demonstrate Tennyson's broader influence on contemporary Arthurian literature and the immense impact of his enchantress on Victorian social discourse.

III. Yeats's Goblin Queen

Tennyson's Vivien was not only the subject of mature authors and artists but exerted a palpable influence on budding creative minds, including that of a teenage W. B. Yeats. As David R. Clark and Rosalind Clark observe, for all his literary achievements, Yeats "was a dramatist first", and at only sixteen years old in the autumn of 1882, he set to work on his first play,

> Of a goblin queen, and a goblin dream
> And a pedlar grey,
>
> Of a speaking magic mirror
> Of a sad and heartless queen
> Of young Asphodel and Clarin
> With his harp of lyric teen.[234]

Entitled *Vivien and Time*, the play is something of a tangential sequel to Tennyson's *Merlin and Vivien* and tells of Vivien's exploits following her imprisonment of Merlin. Playing on the Grimm brothers' fairy tale of *Snow White* (1812), Yeats casts Vivien as an evil queen who curses two lovers—fair Asphodel and noble Clarin—to living deaths before meeting her own untimely end at the hands of an old pedlar named Time. Though Yeats never published the entire play, he published a reworked extract from Act II in 1889 as the dramatic poem

[234] W. B. Yeats, *Vivien and Time* in *W. B. Yeats and the Theatre of Desolate Reality*, by David R. Clark and Rosalind Clark (Washington, D. C.: Catholic University Press of America,1993), 23.

Time and the Witch Vivien.[235] In either case, both the play and the poem speak directly to the legacy of Tennyson's Vivien.

Yeats held Tennyson, and particularly the *Idylls of the King*, in high regard throughout his lifetime, but he was as critical as anyone of the epic's perceived provinciality. Following the Laureate's death in 1892, Yeats declared the *Idylls* to be "the greatest romantic poem of the century", though he also felt that the dedications of the *Idylls* to the Prince Consort and the Queen "lessened the significance of the great imaginative types of Arthur and Guinevere, and cast . . . a ring of absurdity" around the epic.[236] As the title of *Vivien and Time* suggests, Yeats took an early interest in the women of the *Idylls*, though he admitted they contained faults of their own:

> No one will deny excellence to the Idylls of the King; no one will say that Lord Tennyson's Girton girls do not look well in those old costumes of dead chivalry. No one will deny that he has thrown over everything a glamour of radiant words—that the candelabras shine brightly on the fancy ball. Yet here is that which the Idylls do not at any time contain, beauty at once feminine and heroic.

Yeats concluded that "Tennyson's ideal women will never find a flawless sympathy outside the upper English middle class".[237] It is difficult to know if Yeats had in mind all four principal women of the *Idylls* when he wrote this, for Vivien can hardly be read as her sisters can be as representative of the upper English middle-class woman. Indeed, Yeats may have been initially drawn to her because she did not fit this mould.

Vivien and Time is a unique piece of Yeatsian literature in that it is unaffected by the national and occult interests that dominated his later life and work. Before Yeats turned his attention to the legends and lore of Ireland, he was exposed to the Arthurian legend,

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[235] The texts of *Vivien and Time* and *Time and the Witch Vivien* appear side by side in the Clarks' book; references to the play and the poem will hereafter be respectfully cited as *VT* and *TWV* with the corresponding page number of the text taken as it is presented in the Clarks' book.

[236] W. B. Yeats to the Editor of the *Bookman*, November 1892, in *The Letters of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Allan Wade (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1954), 219.

[237] "The Poetry of Sir Samuel Ferguson—II," in *Uncollected Prose by W. B. Yeats*, ed. John P. Frayne, vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 95; Girton was a college for women founded in 1869 and moved to Cambridge in 1873, though it had no official affiliation with the university at the time. Here Yeats may also have in mind Tennyson's scholarly women from *The Princess* (1847).

particularly the tales of Merlin and Vivien, as they were presented in the works of Spenser, Arnold, and of course Tennyson. And as the Clarks suggest, "had not John O'Leary pointed [Yeats] toward Ireland, *The Wanderings of Oisin* of 1889 might well have been a new treatment of Arthurian romance, the story not of Niamh but of her possible namesake Niniane."[238] Yeats's interest in English Arthuriana certainly had a hand in suggesting the theme of *Vivien and Time*. However, his Vivien was principally inspired not by the fictional enchantress of English Arthurian tradition but rather by a very real Irish girl.

Yeats begins *Vivien and Time* with a dedication to the play's vital inspiration. Within the "dreaming palace" of Yeats's imagination—almost certainly a reference to Tennyson's *Palace of Art*—stand many fair statues. One in particular eclipses the rest:

> It is a pale elf statue
> With sweet Titania's grace
> But black's the hair, as though it were
> The peeping pansy's face.
>
> The eyes as the wine are bright
> In Circe's charmèd cup:
> O dark are the eyes as the morning skies
> When scarce the day is up.[239]

Before Yeats was enchanted by Maud Gonne he was bewitched by Laura Armstrong, a girl, who for him, embodied the sweet and dark combination of the Shakespearean fairy queen and the Homeric witch. It is for this tantalizing figure who became for Yeats "a myth and a symbol" that he wrote *Vivien and Time*.[240] Later in life, Yeats remembered Armstrong as "a wild creature, a fine mimic, and given to bursts of religion"—in other words, she made a convincing avatar of Tennyson's Vivien. Though Armstrong and Yeats were never romantically involved, she was every bit as flirtatious as her dramatic counterpart and gladly

[238] Clark and Clark, *Yeats*, 69.
[239] *VT*, 24; c.p. *The Palace of Art*, 1-4, 93-128.
[240] W. B. Yeats to Katharine Tynan, 21 March 1889, in *Letters of W. B. Yeats*, 118.

brought the role of "Vivien" to life for him. In her sole surviving letter to Yeats, Armstrong demonstrates just how alluring she could be:

> My dear Clarin, . . . I like your poems more than I can say—but I should like to hear you read them. I have not nearly finished them. Could you come by some afternoon—and read a little to me—I shall be in all Tuesday afternoon. *I promise!* so can you come? I should have written to you sooner but I have been away from home. Pray excuse my silence. Trusting to see "the poet"—! and with kind regards. Believe me ever yours "Vivien."[241]

She enjoyed the poems but could not be bothered to finish them—though *certainly* they would sound better if only he read them to her. And so "Vivien" enjoyed stringing along her "dear Clarin" if for nothing else than to enjoy the benefits of his devoted affection. *Vivien and Time* was at the very least rehearsed and possibly performed once in front of a small household crowd with Armstrong assuming the lead role.[242]

Though the manuscript survives, Yeats never published *Vivien and Time*. Instead, he excised the pages containing Act II, scene 2, wherein Vivien is killed by Time, rewrote the scene to stand alone, and published the polished playlet with the title *Time and the Witch Vivien* in 1889 as part of his first book of poetry, *The Wanderings of Oisin, and other poems*. As the original pages containing Act II, scene 2 survived Yeats's editing process, I will present the scene alongside *Time and the Witch Vivien* as both fit into the overall narrative of the unpublished play.

Act II, scene 2 of *Vivien and Time* and *Time and the Witch Vivien* are essentially driven by the same plot. Queen Vivien is in love with the knight-poet Sir Clarin, but her love quickly turns to hatred when he admits that he finds the Countess Asphodel fairer than her. Vivien angrily retreats and, in an allusion to *Snow White*, asks her magic mirror if she is the fairest in the land, only to have the mirror reiterate that Asphodel is the fairest. The mirror's response prompts Vivien to order her soldiers to kill Asphodel while she (Vivien), using

[241] Laura Armstrong to W. B. Yeats, 10 August 1884, in *Letters of W. B. Yeats*, 117.
[242] Richard Ellman, *Yeats: The Man and the Masks* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1979), 36.

Merlin's magic book, puts a spell on Clarin forcing him to wander without sleep until his death. Vivien soon after discovers that her knights took pity on Asphodel and that she keeps herself hidden in a cottage in the desert. Disguised as an old gypsy (again alluding to *Snow White*), Vivien finds Asphodel and tricks her into smelling a magic flower which puts her into a deep sleep. Asphodel will be unable to wake as long as Clarin lives, and afterwards, will likewise be forced to wander restlessly until her own death. Clarin learns of Asophdel's fate and rallies a fairy army around him to rescue her and take revenge on Vivien. Meanwhile, Time finds Vivien in her castle and kills her by winning a game of chess. It is here that *Time and the Witch Vivien* begins and ends. However, *Vivien and Time* continues with Clarin arriving shortly after the fatal game to find Vivien dead. He dies immediately after remembering the old grey pedlar's (Time's) prophecy from Act I that he

> would meet
> A great queen whom I'd slay with mine own hand
> O[r] scarce survive her for a minute's space.[243]

The play ends with Asphodel awaking from her sleep and setting off on her sleepless wanderings.

As the Clarks note, Act II, scene 2 of *Vivien and Time* and *Time and the Witch Vivien* represent the "crucial scene" where Vivien meets her end at Time's hands.[244] In the unpublished play, Vivien is alone in her room before the dimly lit magic mirror reminiscing about Asphodel's fate and her thirst for power when she senses a foreboding presence outside her door. The old pedlar Time enters carrying a black bag, a scythe, and an hourglass. Vivien challenges Time to a game of dice in an attempt to win his hourglass. Her ploy fails because, as Vivien claims, Time always plays with "loaded dice". Having lost the hourglass, she then plays him at chess "for triumph in her many plots" where "defeat is death."[245] Time wins

[243] *VT,* 46.
[244] Clark and Clark, *Yeats*, 15.
[245] *VT*, 42.

again, and Vivien dies. The sequence of events is essentially the same in "Time and the Witch Vivien", though there are some differences in setting of the scene. In the published poem, Vivien finds herself in a marble-flagged, pillared room that is occupied by magical instruments and a fountain in the centre of the room. She peers into the fountain and muses on her beauty and power:

> Where moves there any beautiful as I,
> Save . . .
> My image yonder? . . . .
> No; nor is there one
> Of equal power in spells and secret rites.[246]

Time soon enters and the events largely unfold as they do in the play. Vivien suggests that "Chance, and not skill" favours Time in his victories, but when she suffers the fatal checkmate, she declares that "Chance hath a skill!"[247]

Yeats's indebtedness to Tennyson's Vivien manifests itself most clearly in the details of his story, particularly in his use of symbols. When Vivien compares Time's beard to Merlin's, he cautions her: "No taste have I for slumber 'neath an oak".[248] While various types of trees have become associated with the Merlin and Vivien narrative, the oak tree remains a specific Tennysonian detail. The cursed flower that Vivien gives to Asphodel also seems to have roots in Tennyson's idyll; after Merlin tells Vivien the tale of the Queen who "Waged unwilling though successful war / On all the youth," Vivien replies:

> The lady never made *unwilling* war
> With those fine eyes: she had her pleasure in it,
> . . . .
> And lived there neither dame nor damsel then
> Wroth at a lover's loss? . . . .
> Not one to flirt a venom at her eyes,
> Or pinch a murderous dust into her drink,
> Or make her paler with a poisoned rose?[249]

246 *TWV*, 39.
247 Ibid., 45.
248 *VT*, 40.
249 *MV*, 602-609.

One of the most interesting symbols in Yeats's story that he inherits from Tennyson is Merlin's magic book, wherein the charm that Vivien uses to trap Merlin within the oak is contained. In Tennyson's poem, Merlin laughs at Vivien for desiring to read the book because he deems her childish and ignorant, though as he admits,

> a mere child
> Might use it to the harm of anyone,
> And never could undo it . . . .[250]

Merlin's warning is realised in Yeats's story, as the charm that curses Clarin is not read out by Vivien, but by her Page, who happens to be a young boy. The Page knows not what he does as he reads the charm, nor is he able to undo its effects once spoken.

Looking more directly at the character of Yeats's Vivien, there are clear invocations of Tennyson's enchantress. Perhaps the most obvious parallel is Yeats's characterization of Vivien as a singular evil. Like Tennyson's Vivien, Yeats's goblin-queen acts out of hatred and vengeance, often feeling herself slighted by those around her and generally unlucky in love and life. Yeats's Vivien also maintains the adverse attitude towards old age, telling Time that "young girls' wits are better / Than old men's any day, as Merlin found."[251] For all her ethical faults, Clark and Clark suggest that "Yeats's Vivien is a nicer person than Tennyson's, who is essentially evil".[252] This claim appears suspect considering that Yeats also modelled his Vivien on the evil queen from *Snow White*. Furthermore, Yeats's Vivien harbours the same murderous proclivities as both of her literary inspirations.

Yeats's and Tennyson's enchantresses are almost identical in character, yet one glaring difference exists between the two: Yeats's Vivien assumes the title and position of Queen. Though Tennyson never named Vivien "queen" of anything, there is perhaps the implication—particularly through her heretical prophecy in *Balin and Balan*—that he

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[250] *MV*, 682-684.
[251] *TWV*, 43.
[252] Clark and Clark, *Yeats*, 71.

considered her in a sense as the antithetical "Pagan Queen" to Arthur's "Christian King". Yeats may very well have picked up on this polarity of character and finally given Vivien the crown, however jagged, that he felt she deserved. Despite Yeats's elevation of Vivien to Queen, her character remains soiled, and she is still, as Yeats writes in his dedication, "sad and heartless". If anything, Vivien's assumption of her noble title only serves to enhance the ethical faults of Tennyson's Vivien: she destroys the true love shared by Clarin and Asphodel, she pollutes the youthful innocence of her Page by making him read from the book, and she tries, though fails, to cheat the very nature of Time itself. As queen, Vivien is also exceptionally vain and materialistic, traits which do not shine through as clearly in Tennyson's characterization. In *Time and the Witch Vivien*, as she stares into her fountain, she admires how the "greedy golden carp" share the same aurous hue as the sheen of her hair. She also gushes over the beauty of her own "roseate fingers".[253] When Time greets her, Vivien is not interested in the contents of his bag:

> Grey hairs and crutches, crutches and grey hairs,
> Mansions of memories and mellow thoughts
> Where dwell the minds of old men having peace . . . .[254]

These unpleasant gifts mean nothing to Vivien. She only wants Time's hourglass which will preserve her position as Queen and all the power that comes with it. In naming Vivien "goblin-queen", Yeats seems to suggest that it is not over literal folkloric goblins that she lords, but those metaphorical goblins that plague human character: vice, avarice, power, cruelty, and so on.

The most important detail of Yeats's story is Vivien's death. In Tennyson's epic, Vivien is last seen in *Guinevere* sitting beside the Queen with Enid. There is no mention of her afterward, though it can reasonably be assumed that she survived the collapse of Camelot.

[253] *TMV*, 39.
[254] Ibid., 41.

The implication, in any event, is a problematic one for Tennyson: that his evil genius survived his blameless King, and "the high purpose [was] broken by the worm."[255] This problematic conclusion appears to have received no significant critical attention, most likely because Vivien simply fades out of the narrative as Tennyson focuses his attention on Arthur's final moments. Vivien's death in Yeats's story does not reconcile the conclusion of Tennyson's Vivien and Arthur narrative, but it does present what might have been considered by some in late nineteenth-century Britain a more satisfactory and prudent closure to Vivien's story; if she would not be subdued by the ideal King, she would certainly be levelled by that great force which levels all—Time. Where Tennyson's Vivien is never punished for her sins, Yeats's evil queen receives the ultimate punishment in death. This severe punishment seems to arise in part from a difference in narrative form: epics like the *Idylls* are often morally ambiguous while fairy tales, which Yeats evidently draws from, more frequently present simple moral narratives where the good and the evil are clearly defined, the good is rewarded, and the evil is punished. While Yeats interestingly does not reward "the good"—the love between Asphodel and Clarin—in his story, he unequivocally condemns "the evil" Vivien. There is no pageantry in Vivien's death; she is not forced to dance in scalding iron slippers until she dies as in the Grimm tale. Rather, her death is an execution symbolised by Time's scythe: quick, clean, and unspectacular.

In killing Vivien, Yeats boldly does what Tennyson cannot, and so it begs the question why the young dramatist felt it necessary to kill his Goblin Queen. Chene Heady concludes that Yeats kills Vivien "in order to metaphorically kill Tennyson, contrasting a materialistic British literature that, for all its glories, must die with a spiritual Irish literature that, for all its imperfections, might live evermore."[256] Heady's claim is fuelled by Yeats's

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[255] *MV*, 194.

[256] Chene Heady, "'I Am Weary of That Foolish Tale': Yeats's Revision of Tennyson's *Idylls* and Ideals in 'Time and the Witch Vivien'" in *Studies in Medievalism XVI: Medievalism in Technology Old and New*, ed. Karl Fugelso and Carol L. Robinson (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2008), 79.

decision to include *Time and the Witch Vivien* in 1889's *The Wanderings of Oisin* and to withhold the playlet from future collected editions of his poems after 1895. Though Heady's argument is compelling, it appears to dismiss the fundamental connection between *Time and the Witch Vivien* and its mother play. Firstly, the play, and so the scene from which *Time and the Witch Vivien* is derived, was essentially—and innocently—inspired by Yeats's first boyhood love. Following this youthful train of thought, as Yeats was only eighteen when he finished *Vivien and Time*, and he had not yet turned his attention squarely towards Irish literature in 1884, the play was written far more under the tutelage of Tennyson than out of Yeats's spite for the Laureate's conservative Englishness which developed soon *after* the play had been completed. Of course, by the time Yeats decided to publish *Time and the Witch Vivien* in 1889, his obsession with Irish literature was well underway, and there was every opportunity for him to edit the playlet to reflect his newfound nationalistic interests. This did not happen. The changes Yeats made to *Time and the Witch Vivien* to allow it to stand alone are largely aesthetic and not potent enough symbolically to suggest that he is taking direct aim at Tennyson or British literature at large. Additionally, that Yeats would have retroactively applied a metaphorical meaning to Vivien's death in the published poem to signify the death of Tennyson and British literature as a whole would seem a rather unpoetic thing to do, verging on abject pettiness.

Contrary to Heady's claim, Yeats likely had no intention of "killing" Tennyson by killing Vivien because doing so would have dismissed an essential part of the foundation of his own Irish literary project. There is no question that Yeats needed to keep Vivien at arm's length in the interest of cultivating a more specific body of Irish literature, but he surely recognised that Vivien, as intimately associated with Tennyson and Britain as she was, remained a primary catalyst in bringing about his interest in Ireland's mythology and folklore and the genesis of his own literary characters, including the fairy princess Niamh who

debuted in 1889 directly alongside Vivien.[257] And following his indoctrination into the occult, Yeats certainly would have recognised that Vivien's symbolism extended far beyond the bounds of a British-Tennysonian meaning. Perhaps most important of all, Vivien's death was hardly the end of Yeats's engagement with Tennyson or his evil enchantress. As William A. Davis, Jr. has convincingly shown, Tennyson's *Merlin and Vivien* was in no small part responsible for the apocalyptic outlook of Yeats's seminal modernist poem, *The Second Coming* (1920), with Vivien providing a plausible model for the pitiless sphinx who "[slouches] towards Bethlehem to be born" into a post-war world gutted of its innocence.[258] And so, while Yeats may have cast Vivien aside in 1895 in the interest of Ireland, one thing is certain—he could never truly be rid of her.

IV: The Beginning of Vivien's Transcendence

The end of the nineteenth century was also the end of the Tennysonian era. Yet, while Tennyson's cultural influence was on the wane—especially after his death in October 1892—and the Western world marched rapidly towards the *fin de siècle* and Modernism, Vivien underwent a surprising literary transcendence that reverberated well into the twentieth century. She first appears in the final decade of the nineteenth century in Ralph Macleod Fullarton's dramatic poem, *Merlin* (1890). An Edinburgh native, Fullarton was a prominent QC and a lesser-known author who wrote at least three volumes of poetry, all of which were published within the last six years of his life. Besides *Merlin*, his authorial credits include *Tannhäuser: A drama in five acts and in prose and verse* (1893) and a collection of Scottish

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[257] *The Wanderings of Oisin*, the eponymous poem in which Niamh appears, is immediately followed by *Time and the Witch Vivien* in the 1889 volume.

[258] William A. Davis, Jr. "Tennyson's 'Merlin and Vivien' and Yeats's 'The Second Coming'," *Colby Quarterly* 20, no. 4 (December 1984): 212-216; W. B. Yeats, *The Second Coming* in *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* (Churchtown: Cuala Press, 1920), 20.

poems and German translations entitled *Lallan Sangs and German Lyrics* (1894). As his poetical subjects suggest, and owing to a significant continental European education, Fullarton was heavily influenced by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century German literature, particularly the writings of Wagner, Goethe, Schiller, and Heine. Like the rest of Fullarton's work, *Merlin* has been left virtually untouched by critics since its publication. The contemporary critical reception of *Merlin* was generally unfavorable and likely aided in pushing Fullarton's work further into obscurity. The choice to publish a poem about Vivien's seduction of Merlin inevitably drew comparisons to Tennyson, though most critics agreed that Fullarton's work fell well short of Tennyson's narrative in virtually every aspect.[259] Moreover, Vivien appeared to be little more than a spoiled child whose antics were comparable to Goethe's Mephistopheles. Despite the unenthusiastic response to the poem, Fullarton's Vivien represents a significant step in the afterlife of Tennyson's enchantress.

Fullarton's poem begins with a portrait of Merlin: he is a combination of a Romantic poet and a fervent evangelical who professes a Tennysonian doctrine of universal love. Following what appears to be the general narrative scheme of the *Vulgate Lancelot*, Merlin first meets Vivien by his "wizard well" as she mulls over the prophecy which foretells her marriage to the wisest of men, "who should do my will / To his own hurt, and not I his, though wise."[260] She charms Merlin with ease and convinces him to give her his magic ring as proof of his love and loyalty. At Arthur's court, Vivien's various schemes, including putting Enid to sleep with the power of the ring, draw the ire of Morgan—Arthur's sister and Merlin's student who is secretly in love with him. Vivien toys with Morgan, admitting that she entertains Merlin's love only because he is useful to her, while simultaneously enjoying the more appropriate company of the youthful knight, Guyomar. Merlin overhears Vivien's

[259] "Some Volumes of Verse," *The Academy*, no. 924 (18 January 1890): 43; "Recent Verse," *Athenaeum*, no. 3257 (29 March 1890): 402; "Poetry," *Westminster Review* 1, no. 134 (July 1890): 222-223.
[260] Ralph Macleod Fullarton, *Merlin: A Dramatic Poem* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1890), 22.

confession and demands the return of his ring. Vivien's humiliation quickly turns to hatred, and she sets out to take vengeance upon Merlin and Morgan. Vivien easily guilts Merlin into loving her once more, steals the ring back, and puts him to sleep. Wise to Vivien's plot, Morgan discovers the slumbering wizard and is only able to wake him with the aid of a crucifix. Despite Morgan's help and ensuing confession of love, Merlin admits that his love for Vivien keeps him irrevocably bound to her. In a brief aside from the narrative, Merlin shows Vivien his magic mirror, which, to her horror, reflects her as a hideous monster. In the final act of the poem, Vivien orders Merlin to construct a tomb in which both can lie side by side. Sensing his impending doom, Merlin digs a grave with room only enough for one. Taking his place within, Vivien quickly closes the stone over him while he, with his final breath, forgives her transgressions. The sound of Merlin's voice prompts in Vivien a momentary feeling of regret, but when she opens the tomb to retrieve him, he has already expired. Fearing Morgan might discover the body, Vivien seals the tomb permanently and flees into the night.

Tennyson's Vivien provides Fullarton with the essential blueprint for his seductress. She proves a petulant young woman whose primary motivation is hate. Building on Tennyson's model, Fullarton draws heavily on symbolism derived from German myth and fairy tale to develop Vivien's villainous identity. Merlin's magic ring and mirror are the most potent examples. Fullarton's familiarity with German literature suggests that he probably inherits the ring motif from Wagner's *The Ring of the Nibelung* (1874) rather than the *Vulgate Lancelot*. Vivien views Merlin's magic ring as such a Wagnerian emblem of tyrannical power, for once it is in her possession, she declares that she will replace Arthur as King.[261] Regarding the mirror, like Yeats, Fullarton likely follows the tradition of the Grimms' *Snow White*. Reminiscent of the Grimms' tale, Merlin's magic mirror passes moral

[261] Ibid., 50.

judgement, shining bright to the eye that "is clear within" or remaining dim "to the soul that loveth a lie".[262] When Merlin peers into the mirror, it shines brightly upon him; when it is Vivien's turn to look, a horrible monster appears with a visage of "gorgon-eyed despair."[263] The ring and mirror work under a common fairy tale trope of delineating the good from the evil, and they primarily serve to enhance Vivien's identity as the primary evil in Fullarton's poem. Yet, despite their clear symbolic power, Vivien's character is more ethically ambiguous than her fairy tale adornments suggest.

The most interesting, and perhaps most complicating, of Fullarton's developments of Vivien is her industriousness. While Tennyson's Vivien functions as an anti-hero, she nonetheless displays the unshakeable diligence of the poet's Ulysses (1842) in decrying that she will "dig, pick, open, find and read the charm" that Merlin conceals from her.[264] Fullarton's Vivien exhibits a comparable assiduousness which is juxtaposed alongside Merlin's spiritual devotion. She takes particular issue with the passive nature of Merlin's habitual prayer routine:

> The parson says God ever aids the man
> Who lives the thing he prays. Well, I live mine.
> The thing I do I pray it be done.[265]

One of Vivien's defining characteristics in Fullarton's poem is her proactivity. She champions self-determinism in a similar sense to Tennyson's Vivien, but a self-determinism that comes closer to invoking Thomas Carlyle's quasi-religious "Gospel of Work" which proclaims, "Know thy work and do it."[266] Prayer alone does not bring Vivien comfort; as she declares:

> I too have prayed. Not that I trust to that.
> I work incessantly; and highest God,

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[262] Ibid., 108.
[263] Ibid., 116.
[264] *MV*, 658.
[265] Fullarton, *Merlin*, 122.
[266] Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1894), 168.

gives set will his way.[267]

Vivien's self-deterministic attitude provides her with a staunch realist worldview. In contrast to Merlin, who subscribes to a Wordsworthian naturalistic spiritualism, Vivien does not entertain an idealised view of the world. Hers is rather the paradoxically cynical yet hopeful outlook of the broader European *fin de siècle*. She considers the world as governed by games of power, and she declares herself content "to play the world's own game / The world's own way".[268] Vivien's potent self-determinism makes her exceptionally adept at playing the "world's game", though she finds—as Yeats's Vivien does—that Chance proves to be a formidable opponent. However, she has a practical method of assuring her victory over such a powerful force:

> The constant mind is her own destiny.
> Chance never is persistent; I—persist.[269]

If Vivien's work ethic makes her a veritable disciple of Carlyle, her sheer willpower also makes her a follower of one of Fullarton's most famous German contemporaries—Friedrich Nietzsche. Fullarton's affinity with German literature makes it possible that he was familiar with and perhaps reading some of Nietzsche's work while writing *Merlin*. Vivien looks to be the most convincing evidence of this. Besides displaying a potent "will to power", her perception of hatred has notable Nietzschean overtones. Hatred is Vivien's primary motivation; it drives her, she states, to be "a thing inspired" and lifts her beyond mortality to a "superhuman state."[270] Though Vivien's hatred proves destructive, that she sees herself as "inspired" suggests that her hatred also entertains an essence of creativity. Nietzsche's "philosophy of hatred" entertains such a progenitive concept of hatred and considers it an indispensable part of human expansionism and personal development leading to self-

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[267] Fullarton, *Merlin*, 138.
[268] Ibid., 122-123.
[269] Ibid., 138.
[270] Ibid., 74.

actualisation.[271] The perceived superhuman state Vivien's hatred elevates her to also parallels Nietzsche's concept of the *Übermensch*, or "Beyond-human"—a state of being free from the constraints of Christian idealism which Nietzsche considered to be the goal for the future human condition.[272] As the murder of the evangelical Merlin intimates, Vivien seems a viable representative of Nietzsche's *Übermensch* mentality. In this light, her hatred is essentially amoralistic and serves primarily as a means of personal advancement. Fullarton's Vivien might be evil, or she might simply be living up to her full human potential.

Despite what early critics made of her, Fullarton's Vivien is not an easy character to read. Her complexity is accentuated by the contrast of a definitive symbolism and an intricate philosophical disposition. The difficulty in reading her comes from an unstable identity that fluctuates between a fabled evil queen born out of Christian morality and a nondogmatic nineteenth-century realist. She appears at once reprehensible and respectable, supplanting Merlin's Christian idealism with a doctrine of steadfast self-determination. As a product of Fullarton's engagement with German, Scottish, and English literature, Vivien is, as she says, a modernised "woman of the world"—remarkably intelligent, intensely self-aware, and exceptionally industrious.[273] Despite her resignation to the shadows of Arthurian literary history, Fullarton's Vivien is emblematic of the philosophical and spiritual complexity that would come to define many subsequent interpretations of the character. And as Fullarton's broader European development of Vivien suggests, she became emblematic of a grander cross-cultural Western tradition of poetry, mythology, and philosophy at the turn of the century.

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[271] Though Nietzsche never put forth a unified "philosophy of hatred", Herman W. Siemens compiles his writings on the subject of hatred in "Nietzsche's Philosophy of Hatred," *Tijdschrift Voor Filosofie* 77, no. 4 (2015): 747–784.
[272] Nietzsche first introduced the concept of the *Übermensch* in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883).
[273] Fullarton, *Merlin*, 129.

No poet in the last decade of the nineteenth century elevated Vivien's character to greater symbolic heights than the American Richard Hovey (1864-1900). Remembered largely for his collaborations with fellow poet Carmen Bliss and his translations of Maurice Maeterlinck's plays, Hovey embarked on an ambitious Arthurian project before meeting a premature death at the age of thirty-six. Entitled *Launcelot and Guinevere*, the work was to become one long poem composed of nine dramas in three subdivided parts. Of the nine, only two masques (*The Quest of Merlin* and *Taliesin*), one tragedy (*The Marriage of Guenevere*), and one romantic drama (*The Birth of Galahad*) were completed and published. Fragments of the final five dramas were published six years after Hovey's death by his widow, along with his notes and plans for the project. The program of each of the three subdivisions was to contain a musical masque that acted as a prelude to a subsequent tragedy which was followed by a play that provided a partial or a complete reconciliation or solution to the first two parts.[274] Though incomplete, the published dramas and fragments present a powerful narrative of spiritual growth and the triumph of the human spirit.

Hovey sympathised with Tennyson in his understanding of the Arthurian legend's applicability to his own era, yet he believed, as many others did, that the idealism of Tennyson's *Idylls* was outdated and exceptionally divisive. While Tennyson's tale is one of "shadowing sense at war with soul", Allan Houston Macdonald writes that Hovey's is rather a "story of sense and soul allied against rigid social usage." Hovey found reason for optimism in Camelot's story where Tennyson's proved pessimistic, for he located in the kingdom's destruction "a symbol of what might be if a new synthesis were to be achieved."[275] In contrast to Tennyson, Hovey saw the Arthurian legend as presenting an opportunity to

[274] Richard Hovey, *The Holy Graal, and Other Fragments*, ed. Mrs. Richard Hovey (New York: Duffield & Company, 1907), 23.
[275] Allan Houston Macdonald, *Richard Hovey: Man & Craftsman* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1957), 81.

reconsider the nature of sin and reconcile the evils of the world with the human spiritual journey towards achieving the ultimate good.

Nimue plays an indispensable role in Hovey's story of spiritual transcendence. As the name suggests, she is not Tennyson's Vivien and proves to be almost her exact opposite. Where Tennyson's Vivien is an engine of destruction, Hovey's Nimue is one of creation. Moreover, like Malory's Nynive, Hovey's Nimue has two essential identities: she begins as a maiden of the Lady of the Lake in *The Quest of Merlin* before assuming the role of the Lady and the title of "earth goddess" in *Taliesin*. Nimue's evolution is indicative of Hovey's overarching narrative of spiritual growth, and she plays the role of spiritual guide to Merlin and Taliesin who undertake their own quests for enlightenment.

Beginning with Hovey's first poetic masque, *The Quest of Merlin* follows the wizard as he seeks to learn what will become of Arthur's impending marriage to Guenevere. He first arrives in the depths of Mount Hecla to consult the Norns. Boasting to him of their power, the sisters of fate prophesise the doom of the maiden, the knight, and the Prince. Merlin falls into a swoon and awakens in Avalon. He is greeted by all manner of magical creatures and train of mythical figures including Pan and Bacchus, Oberon and Titania, and a host of Valkyrs who come to shepherd Aphrodite to Asgard so that her passionate Southern heart can join with the stoical strength and will of the North. Following the procession, the Lady of the Lake arrives and similarly foretells the misery that will come from Arthur's union with Guenevere. However, she also assures Merlin that the ensuing pain and sorrow is necessary, for it drives the human spirit to grow ever larger. The water-witch Nimue soon comes to shepherd Merlin back to Camelot in a chariot drawn by dragons. As they fly into night, three spirits appear as the Star of Arthur, the Star of Launcelot, and the Star of Guenevere. They predict that the strife caused by the love-triangle will ultimately lead to a harmonious conclusion in which Arthur will be leveled by "the stroke of his own seed", Launcelot's "true

soul" will prevail, and Guenevere will "leave a name beyond Time's scorn". As the spirits vanish, Nimue tells Merlin to follow his own star, to which he replies, "I follow thee."[276]

Hovey's Nimue bears little resemblance to Tennyson's Vivien. A subtle bond of sorcery is revealed through Nimue's dragon-led chariot, the chosen vehicle for both Medea and Circe in Greek tradition, but Hovey's water-witch remains essentially the product of his own imagination. Nimue is emblematic of one of three truths presented in the poem. Like the rest of the maidens of the Lake, she is an Origin, a spirit of Will who works contrary to yet also in tandem with the Norns who are the Finishers, or the spirits of Fate. As Merlin's willful guide, Nimue proves more optimistic than either the Norns or the Lady of the Lake. Merlin believes himself to be a blind seer, "[groping] and [stumbling] like a man in the dark"; Nimue counters his belief by pointing out that though he falters, he yet survives a path on which others would surely perish.[277] And though his "leaping at Godhood" has left him broken, she dictates that any who would hope to win such a state "must leap."[278] As Merlin's "star", Nimue's purpose is to lead him on to action, to push him towards confronting Camelot's fate in the interest of achieving Hovey's third truth—the final triumph of the human spirit beyond the bounds of Will and Fate.

In *Taliesin*, Nimue makes her own leap to godhood, evolving from witch-maiden into an avatar of Mother Earth. Hovey's second masque opens on the poet and the knight Percival in Broceliande. Both seek Merlin who now lies in an enchanted sleep. Voices resound in the forest calling out to spirits to return to the world of dream, that "sea of Being" wherein there is no strife and all identities become an indiscriminate unity. The defiant Percival heeds not the spirits' call, as he seeks a practical remedy from Merlin to rescue Camelot from its plight. Meanwhile, as sleep threatens to overtake Taliesin, the forms of Merlin and Nimue appear

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[276] Richard Hovey, *The Quest of Merlin* (New York: Duffield & Company, 1907), 80.
[277] Ibid., 51.
[278] Ibid., 53.

amidst a diffused light. Merlin, speaking through the power of his dream, reveals to Taliesin that he will go on "to win / From brighter powers intenser wakefulness". His first step towards intensified consciousness begins with beholding the earth goddess in all her naked beauty. Nimue first puts Percival to sleep because his ascetic morality prevents him from bearing witness to her nakedness. She then warns Taliesin that her beauty will threaten to drive him mad, though he must learn to master his love of natural beauty. Throwing back her mantle, Nimue's subtler garments of "roseate yellow" begin to melt away into "draperies of light", leaving her "manifest in her beauty."[279] Taliesin steps into the circle of light which envelops the goddess, kisses her, and the scene plunges into darkness.

The second movement opens on Nimue and Taliesin standing on the slopes of Helicon. From their union a spirit child is born, an uncouth and hairy elf-like thing that spouts childish rhymes and primitive sounds. Leaving Nimue behind, Taliesin and the child climb to the summit of Helicon where they encounter the nine Muses. The child joins them in a ritual dance and slowly transforms from a wild spirit into an embodied youth of perfect beauty. The young boy is tasked with carrying out the poet's holy work,

> To fashion worlds in little, making form,
> As God does, one with spirit,—be the priest
> Who makes God into bread to feed the world.[280]

Apollo descends and breathes the flame on inspiration into the boy before sending him out into the world fulfill his poetic vocation.

The final movement of Hovey's masque takes place in the Chapel of the Graal. Talisein sits and plays his harp, while Nimue, adorned with an electric mantle, stands over a sleeping Percival. As he awakens, Nimue fades away, leaving a vague wraith like form behind that intermittently appears in the shadows. Percival approaches the golden doors

[279] Richard Hovey, *Taliesin: A Masque* (Boston: Small, Maynard and Company, 1900), 18.
[280] Ibid., 31.

which conceal the Graal, but his quest is stifled by Uriel and the Seven Angels. He proves too inhumanly idealistic and his soul too clouded by anger and hate. Uriel instead allows Taliesin to glimpse the Supreme through a sphere of diamond because his human imperfection and poetic vision allow him to see what Percival's resentment blinds him to. Taliesin witnesses a vision of joy before disclosing that the final revelation of the Supreme will only be witnessed by the man who can reconcile the evils and paradoxes of the world with the pursuit of ultimate human condition.

Nimue the earth goddess has even less in common with Tennyson's Vivien than Nimue the witch-maiden. She instead parallels Tennyson's conception of the Gleam—the higher poetic imagination which he also associated with Nimue. Hovey's Nimue is perhaps a more definitive figure of the two, as she more distinctively represents the initial spark of the poetic imagination. In this she carries over her identity from *The Quest of Merlin* as an Origin of progenitive Will. Hovey locates the source of the poetic spark in the natural beauty of the world which Nimue symbolises. It is through the progenitive quality of the spark that she describes herself as a mother:

> They to whom *I* bear children, the birth-throes feel
> In spirit and brain, though I, the immortal, impassive,
> Suffer only, indwelling the dark of their being, in them.
> Lo, the earth is my womb, and the air is the door of my womb,
> And the domed sky is big with the births of my teeming.[281]

Hovey's Nimue is the source of all poetic creation. She lies dormant in the soul of every human waiting until the first moment of enlightenment wherein the spark of her is ignited in the imagination and the product of her influence is released into the world through the poet. As Hovey intimates, many struggle to reach the principal stage of enlightenment. Percival's superhuman asceticism closes him off to perceiving the world's natural beauty in its full, often paradoxical, splendor. And so, as the episode in the Graal Chapel intimates, Nimue

[281] Ibid., 20.

hovers over Percival with an anticipatory glow, but his blinded idealism keeps her ever in the shadows and just out of his sight. She only reveals herself to those like Taliesin who can see natural beauty for what it is—a vital essence encompassing both the good and the bad, perfection and imperfection.

Hovey's Nimue is the most original and most complex take on the Nimue/Vivien character to appear in the nineteenth century. As the product of Hovey's singular imagination, she can be exceptionally difficult to read; yet her symbolist propensities also open her characterization up to a variety of potential meanings. It is clear, though, that Hovey saw in Nimue a figure who could speak to a greater narrative beyond that of the poet's journey towards enlightenment. Set against a backdrop of Greek, Norse, and British myth, Hovey enters Nimue into a wider Western pantheon. She is no mere goddess, however, and he employs her as the harmoniser of the whole of Western mythology—both North and South—as an avatar of the earth goddess. Hovey's Nimue is a primordial power, and in this, she speaks to not only Western mythology, but to a timeless transglobal body of creation narratives. Though Hovey was never able to finish his "poem in dramas", the complex spirit of his Nimue would live on, particularly in the works of Edwin Arlington Robinson, Dion Fortune, and John Cowper Powys.

The American poet Madison Cawein (1865-1914) produced the last significant interpretation of Vivien in the nineteenth century. Unlike many of the poets discussed in this chapter, Cawein openly acknowledged Tennyson's influence and unequivocally viewed him as one of his poetic masters.[282] Cawein was first inspired by Milton to take up the Arthurian legend at the young age of eighteen, but after reading the *Idylls*, he felt himself so inadequate as a poet that he "at once burned all his efforts."[283] The young poet did not remain

[282] Otto Arthur Rothert, *The Story of a Poet: Madison Cawein* (Louisville: John P. Morton & Co., 1921), 85, 122.
[283] Ibid., 99.

discouraged for long, however, and he went on to publish half a dozen Arthurian-themed poems in his lifetime. Tennyson's influence, particularly his lyrical quality, can be detected in each one of Cawein's Arthurian works, yet nowhere is the Laureate's influence more apparent than in one of Cawein's most enthralling lyrics entitled *Her Vivien Eyes* (1898). I reproduce here the poem in its entirety:

> Her Vivien eyes,—beware! beware!—
> Though they be stars, a deadly snare
> They set beneath her night of hair.
> Regard them not! lest, drawing near—
> As sages once in old Chaldee—
> Thou shouldst become a worshiper,
> And they thy evil destiny.
>
> Her Vivien eyes,—away! Away!—
> Though they be springs, remorseless they
> Gleam underneath her brow's bright day.
> Turn, turn aside, whate'er the cost!
> Lest in their deeps thou lures behold,
> Through which thy captive soul were lost,
> As was young Hylas once of old.
>
> Her Vivien eyes,—take heed! take heed—
> Though they be bibles, none may read
> Therein of God or Holy Creed.
> Look, look away! lest thou be cursed,—
> As Merlin was, romances tell,—
> And in their sorcerous spells immersed,
> Hoping for Heaven thou chance on Hell.[284]

What makes Cawein's characterization of Vivien particularly interesting at the end of the century is that it revives the character's vital wickedness that was popularised by Tennyson. The imprint of Tennyson's enchantress can immediately be felt in the menacing timbre of Cawein's poem, and the woman who possesses "Vivien eyes"—who may or may not be Vivien herself—strongly elicits the destructive aspect of Tennyson's poetic imagination. Cawein recreates the narrative of fatal sensual desire from *Merlin and Vivien* by

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[284] Madison Cawein, *Her Vivien Eyes* in *Idyllic Monologues* (Louisville: John P. Morton and Company, 1898), 101-102.

focusing specifically on the illusory quality of the woman's eyes: they appear bright stars that prove black holes; they seem calm springs yet swarm with ravenous nymphs below; they beam with holiness but smoulder with damnation. The woman's eyes gleam in such a way as to possibly invoke the symbolism of Tennyson's and Hovey's Nimue, but Cawein leaves little room for doubt that this gleam is also a mirage. Only evil shines behind "Vivien eyes".

Cawein's portrait of Vivien stands out as an oddity at the end of the nineteenth century. Fullarton's Vivien and Hovey's Nimue built upon Tennyson's models and updated their characters to reflect the evolving social and philosophical concerns at the end of the century. In contrast, Cawein's portrait appears to remain firmly in a mid-century Victorian past, and it begs the question as to why he felt it necessary to revive a character whom the majority of concurrent Anglo-American authors of the Arthurian legend were ready to leave dead and buried alongside Tennyson's anachronistic idealism. The answer appears to be that Cawein's portrait does not act as a revival of Vivien at all, but instead exists as a monument to the character and to Tennyson himself. Tennyson's Vivien was kept alive in the nineteenth century imagination primarily by the immense power of her polarity. She was perceived as either a pinnacle of sensualist art or as a paragon of Christian evil, and it is in this debate that she found her most potent vitality. However, as Cawein's exhausted portrait exemplifies, with disputes over her meaning subsiding, and with Tennyson's cultural influence waning in the wake of his death, little energy remained at the end of the century to sustain Vivien in the public imagination. But she would not stay dead for long, and her revitalization in the new century seems to have been predicted by Heileman Wilson's four-line poem about Merlin and Vivien from 1895:

> The gnarled Oak stood gaunt and bare,
> Type of the heart sore bruised in bitter strife;
> But gracious Spring, nymph of the air,

By loving, led him into perfect life.[285]

As the age of Tennyson withered away like the gnarled oak, the twentieth century swiftly came to breathe new life into Vivien and carry her off into even more complex realms of poetic imagination and spiritual enlightenment.

The multivalent nineteenth-century creative response to Tennyson's Vivien does not reflect a straightforward chronological evolution of the character. Rather, it can be considered the chaotic rebirth of the Vivien character; it is an "embryo" containing the social, psychological, and mythological elements from which the complex twentieth-century Vivien would take shape. The early literary responses to Tennyson's Vivien posit her as a new, Jungianesque psychological and literary archetype of the character, largely supplanting the models of Malory and his predecessors; the parodies of Vivien, while not as consequential to the character's development as other nineteenth-century productions, highlight the character's multifaceted relevancy in Western literature and psycho-social discourse; finally, end-of-the-century interpretations of Vivien such as Yeats's Goblin Queen and Hovey's Nimue cultivate a subconscious mythical attribute of the character that, under the later influence of Jung, would be more completely revealed in the writings of Dion Fortune and John Cowper Powys.

[285] Heileman Wilson, *Merlin and Vivien* in *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine: November 1894 to April 1895* (New York: The Century Co., 1895), 320.

Chapter 3: Vivien in the Twentieth Century

I: Vivien and Children's Arthurian Literature

Tennyson's death in 1892 left an indelible impression on both his admirers and detractors in Britain and America, and as the nineteenth century gave way to the twentieth, the poet's influence loomed large over the production of new Arthuriana despite fervent attempts to carve out new literary and artistic movements. The first literary movement to take hold of Tennyson's Vivien was, perhaps surprisingly, children's Arthurian literature. Before Tennyson, Malory had dominated both the mature and juvenile English imagination of Arthur and his court for almost four hundred years. By 1862, however, Sir James Thomas Knowles—a close friend of Tennyson's and author of one of the first Arthurian books aimed expressly at a young audience, *The Story of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table* (1862)—deemed the anachronistic *Morte Darthur* "too long, too monotonous, and too obscure" to be of any interest to the modern child.[286] Despite Knowles's beliefs, many authors of children's Arthuriana in the nineteenth and early twentieth century continued to find Malory the most pliable starting point for their narratives. But while Malory provided many authors with a basic narrative structure for their stories, as Andrew Lynch points out, "the first children's retellings [of the *Morte*] follow contemporary adult taste", which at the turn of the century was still primarily firmly entrenched in Tennyson.[287] Therefore, as Elly McCausland writes, Malory's "many adapters . . . offered a version of 'Malory-via-Tennyson', often acknowledged by direct reference to, or quotation of, the Idylls."

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[286] Sir James Thomas Knowles, *The Story of King Arthur and His Knights of the Round Table* (London: Griffin and Farran, 1862), i; Knowles changed the title from the third edition onwards to *The Legends of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table*.

[287] Andrew Lynch, "*Le Morte Darthur* for Children: Malory's Third Tradition" in *Adapting the Arthurian Legends for Children: Essays on Arthurian Juvenilia*, ed. Barbara Tepa Lupack (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 13.

Furthermore, new adaptions of the Arthurian legend "remained indebted to Tennyson's manipulation of Malory in one way or another, whether engaging in backlash against his overt moralism, or reinforcing the Idylls' assertion of Arthur's spiritual heroism."[288] So while Malory may have provided many Arthurian adapters with the bones of their children's narratives, it was Tennyson who frequently dressed their narratives with the social, political, and spiritual concerns of the modern era.

One of the most profound effects of Tennyson's *Idylls* on nineteenth- and twentieth-century children's Arthurian literature was the increased presence and significance of Camelot's women. As Lynch notes, the direct result of the popularity of Tennyson's Arthurian women was that "female characters became far more important" in children's stories than in Malory. However, Lynch concedes that this "is not to suggest that they were empowered beyond traditional gender roles."[289] Authors like Margaret Vere Farrington, Frances Nimmo Greene, and Beatrice Clay were drawn to Tennyson's tales of Elaine, Lynette, and Enid—virtuous women of good moral standing and who demonstrated acceptable female behavior to a readership that, while predominantly populated by young boys, was expanding, however slowly, to accommodate young girls.[290] Tennyson's repentant Guinevere also became the standard model for children's literature, though she was adapted with greater leniency to accommodate for her traditional impropriety. Guinevere's sexual relationship with Lancelot is regularly downplayed, as in Greene's *Legends of King Arthur and His Court* (1901), where the pair are charged not for their forbidden love but for their lack of faith in Arthur's noble vision, or as in U. Waldo Cutler's *Stories of King Arthur and*

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[288] Elly McCausland, *Malory's Magic Book: King Arthur and the Child, 1862-1980* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2019), 3.
[289] Lynch, "*Le Morte Darthur* for Children," 14.
[290] Margaret Vere Farrington, *Tales of King Arthur and His Knights of the Round Table* (New York: G. P. Putnam and Sons, 1888); Frances Nimmo Greene, *Legends of King Arthur and His Court* (Boston: Ginn & Co., 1901); Beatrice Clay, *Stories of King Arthur and the Round Table* (London: J. M. Dent & Co., 1905).

his Knights (1905), where their relationship is resigned to a scandalous "friendship".[291] Though nineteenth- and twentieth-century children's authors provided more space in their stories for tales of Camelot's women at the encouragement of Tennyson's own success in doing so, the predominant conservative Anglo-American attitudes towards limited female agency—which had been implicit in the *Idylls* since 1859—largely prevented Camelot's women from being developed beyond the constraints of conventional gender roles and "proper" female behavior in children's Arthurian literature.

Some women from the *Idylls*, such as the devout Enid or the angelic Elaine, lent themselves easily to direct adaptation in children's Arthurian literature. As a highly sexualised embodiment of Christian evil, Tennyson's Vivien does not immediately present herself as a character appropriate for impressionable young minds. Tennyson's Vivien presented an obvious hurdle for nineteenth- and twentieth-century children's authors who developed varying solutions to the problem. The easiest way to censor the impropriety of Tennyson's enchantress, and a path which many authors took, including Sidney Lanier in his popular *Boy's King Arthur* (1880), was to simply not include her episode with Merlin.[292] Authors that chose to treat Merlin and Vivien's story employ different censorship techniques, the most prevalent of which is the reversion to traditional narrative details. Many authors emulate the brevity of the encounter found in Malory, resigning the entrapment to a small paragraph, at most a page or two; a significant aspect of this approach is that authors uniformly leave out the problematic detail of Merlin's predatory pursuit of Vivien's virginity which Malory had borrowed from the French romances. Other authors, such as Farrington and Charles Henry Hanson, adhere to the French romances and somewhat pacify the severity of Vivien's crime against Merlin by also casting her as the maternalistic guardian of the

[291] U. Waldo Cutler, *Stories of King Arthur and His Knights* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1904), 274.
[292] Sidney Lanier, ed., *The Boy's King Arthur* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, and Rivington, 1880).

infant Lancelot.[293] Some authors who depict Merlin and Vivien's encounter come closer to Tennyson's narrative by way of recognisable imagery and textual parallels, the most significant example being Henry Frowde in his *Children's King Arthur: Stories from Tennyson and Malory* (1909). Frowde is one of the few authors who attempts a faithful adaption of Tennyson's idyll. In his story, he describes Vivien in terms of a serpent and includes the climactic storm, the effect of which leaves Frowde's Merlin, like Tennyson's, suggestively "outworn and weary" and ultimately imprisoned in a tree by Vivien.[294]

Many nineteenth- and twentieth-century volumes of children's Arthurian literature contain illustrations, and though Tennyson's Vivien is subjected to significant authorial censorship, she evidently remained the chief muse for children's book illustrators. There is one Vivien scene that appears most frequently in children's Arthuriana—that of Vivien casting her spell on Merlin. Illustrators' largely singular interest in this scene likely stems from the immense popularity of both Gustave Doré's illustrations of the *Idylls* and the Tennysonian-inspired work of the Pre-Raphaelites, specifically the three Merlin and Vivien paintings by Edward Burne-Jones (figs. 3-6). Artistic depictions of Vivien's enchantment of Merlin found their way into the pages of even the most popular children's Arthurian volumes, including Andrew Lang's *Book of Romance* (1902) and Beatrice Clay's *Stories of King Arthur and the Round Table* (1905) (figs. 8 and 9). Yet the unshakeable hold of Tennyson's Vivien over the prevailing nineteenth- and twentieth-century perception of her character is most forcefully demonstrated by three different illustrations of Vivien which appeared between 1862 and 1923 in James Thomas Knowles's frequently reissued *Story of King Arthur*.

[293] Charles Henry Hanson, *Stories of the Days of King Arthur* (Edinburgh: T. Nelson and Sons, 1882).
[294] Henry Frowde, *The Children's King Arthur: Stories from Tennyson and Malory* (London: Henry Frowde and Hodder & Stoughton, 1909), 28.

Knowles's book, chiefly inspired by Tennyson yet beholden to Malory's narrative model, marks Vivien's first appearance in children's Arthurian literature following the publication of the *Idylls*. While the narrative of Knowles's Vivien, notably unnamed in his text, closely follows Malory, he, as well as the book's artists, accentuates the story with Tennysonian details. The first edition of Knowles's book from 1862 includes an illustration by George Housman Thomas which portrays the unnamed damsel from the story standing over Merlin as she encloses him within a hollowed out oak tree (fig. 10). Despite Knowles not explicitly identifying his damsel, Thomas nevertheless chose to title his illustration *Merlin and Vivien*. The ninth edition of Knowles's book printed in 1912 contains a painting by Lancelot Speed which depicts the damsel dancing and waving her hands above Merlin as he is eerily absorbed into an oak tree (fig. 11). Speed's damsel largely retains her anonymity from Knowles's text, yet the black cats with bright eyes that appear in the shadows of the tree seem to suggest Tennyson's Vivien, whose petulance Merlin equates with a kitten's.[295] Lastly, the 1923 edition of Knowles's book showcases an exceptionally Tennysonian illustration by Louis Rhead titled *The Wily Vivien*, in which Vivien is seen reading from Merlin's magic book (fig. 12).[296] Though Knowles includes the Tennysonian detail of the oak tree in his story, there is little else to suggest that his damsel is indeed Tennyson's Vivien. Yet despite Knowles's equivocality and adherence to Malory's narrative, each illustrator of Vivien plainly draws, in one way or another, on a distinctly Tennysonian aesthetic: Thomas in his illustration title, Speed in the damsel's posture and his marginal ethereal cats, Rhead in his illustration title and magic book. With very little prompting from Knowles, Tennyson's Vivien appears to have been the natural aesthetic choice for each illustrator. The illustrations to Knowles's book primarily suggest the imagistic pervasiveness of Tennyson's Vivien from

[295] *MV*, 173-175.
[296] Before illustrating Knowles's book, Rhead and his brother had illustrated an edition of Tennyson's first four *Idylls* in 1898.

the nineteenth into the twentieth century, but they also demonstrate the conservative approach towards illustrating Vivien in children's literature that prevailed well into the new millennium. All of Thomas's, Speed's, and Rhead's illustrations present Vivien as magical and strange, but not perceptibly malicious and immoral. And unlike Tennyson's Vivien who wears scandalously revealing garments, the three illustrated Viviens accompanying Knowles's book are dressed modestly, and none of them display the suggestive serpentine posture or accoutrements that augment the sexual nature of Tennyson's enchantress. The work of Thomas, Speed, and Rhead is emblematic of the broader nineteenth- and twentieth-century conservative approach to illustrating Vivien for children, an approach that mirrors the conservative textual treatment of her: at her worst she is depicted as a petulant girl, at her best as an icon of female modesty.

No children's author or illustrator in the twentieth century gives Vivien a more comprehensive treatment than Howard Pyle—author and illustrator of four Arthurian children's books between 1903 and 1910. Though seldom remembered today, Pyle was well-known in America near the turn of the century for his development of the Brandywine School—a distinct American style of storybook illustration inspired by American historical aesthetics and the nation's natural features—and his storybooks of pirates, bandits, and knights, including the hugely successful *Merry Adventures of Robin Hood* (1883).[297] Pyle's children's Arthuriad—comprised of *The Story of King Arthur and His Knights* (1903), *The Story of the Champions of the Round Table* (1905), *The Story of Sir Launcelot and His Companions* (1907), and *The Story of the Grail and the Passing of Arthur* (1910)—owes much to the narrative influence of Malory, but it also draws heavily on the wider expanse of Arthurian legend: from the medieval French romances and the *Mabinogion*, to the more

[297] Pyle also illustrated Tennyson's *Lady of Shalott* in 1881, but, according to the Lupacks, he later criticised the quality of his own artwork (*King Arthur in America*, 81).

contemporary adaptations of Knowles, Lanier, and of course Tennyson. Though many of Pyle's contemporaries employ the legend as a mode of juvenile social and spiritual education—particularly for young boys—no author approaches the legend with as much didactic enthusiasm and vision as Pyle does.[298] In Pyle's mind, previous treatments of the Arthurian legends were tainted by their frequent depictions of unethical behavior. As he lamented to a friend, "the stories of chivalry seem to be very full not only of meanness and of treachery, but of murder and many other and nameless wickednesses that discolor the very noblest of the characters—such, even, as the character of King Arthur himself." Pyle therefore aimed to present in his stories "all that is noble and high and great, and to omit, if possible, all that is cruel and mean and treacherous."[299]

As the appearance of Vivien in his stories suggests, Pyle did not quite hit his lofty ethical mark, though this is unsurprising considering his passionate interest in both heroes *and* villains. As Lucien Agosta writes, Pyle's Arthuriad, like his other books featuring pirates, bandits, and knights, explore "the tensions between civilization and barbarism, law and license, social order and individual freedom. Drawing his heroes and adventurers from both sides of these dialectics, [Pyle] admired those who foster civilization and was fascinated by those who subvert it."[300] It is likely because of Pyle's dialectical interests that he chose to characterise both Vivien and Nimue (Nymue) in his stories as adversaries—Vivien as the villain, Nymue as the hero. Much like Tennyson's Vivien, Pyle's Vivien is a femme fatale born directly out of the Romantic tradition. As Agosta writes, Pyle shared "the 'romanticist's' intense fascination with the beguiling mask of beauty so often worn by fatal and evil women in the works of Rossetti and his followers."[301] Yet despite his fascination, Pyle subscribed to

[298] For discussions of Pyle's intended audience, see Julie Nelson Couch, "Howard Pyle's 'The Story of King Arthur and His Knights' and the Bourgeois Boy Reader," *Arthuriana* 13, no. 2 (Summer 2003): 38-53, and Lupack and Lupack, *King Arthur in America*, 80-92.
[299] Pyle quoted in *Howard Pyle: A Chronicle*, by Charles D. Abbott (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1925), 128.
[300] Lucien Agosta, *Howard Pyle* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987), 1-2.
[301] Ibid., 45.

what Mark Girouard terms “the moralist tradition” of nineteenth-century Arthurian literature, a tradition of which Tennyson was the vanguard.[302] Indeed, Pyle was as staunch in his Christian conservativism as Tennyson, and his Arthuriad espouses a patriarchal social hierarchy not unlike the model presented in the *Idylls*. The “heroic” Nymue therefore represents Pyle’s ideal model of neo-Victorian womanhood—the submissive dutiful and spiritual matron. The adversarial relationship between Vivien and Nymue plays a significant part in the overarching didactic vision of Pyle’s Arthuriad as a practical manual for proper social behavior, with Vivien and Nymue demonstrating what kind of woman young girls should and should not aspire to be, and what type of woman young boys should and should not revere.

In Pyle’s first book, *The Story of King Arthur and His Knights*, Vivien is quickly constructed as one of Camelot’s principal villains. Styled after the *Suite du Merlin*’s Ninianne as the fifteen-year-old daughter of the King of Northumberland, Pyle’s Vivien is “wise and cunning beyond all measure for one so young”, yet she is also heartless, “being cold and cruel to all who [are] contrary-minded to her wishes.”[303] Encouraged by the prospect of acquiring Merlin’s exceptional knowledge, Vivien agrees to help Queen Morgana le Fay subdue him and is given two rings—one to enchant the wizard and one with which to control him. Merlin offers Vivien the chance to “lessen the sin” of her ensuing betrayal of him by saving Arthur from Accolon, but she sullies her act of absolution by healing Arthur of his wounds while allowing Accolon to die of his.[304] Vivien is last seen in Pyle’s first book alongside Arthur as he searches for Morgana following her theft of Excalibur’s sheath. Revealing to Arthur that Morgana has turned herself and her retinue into a ring of stones to hide from him, Vivien offers to undo the enchantment. However, her potentially good deed is

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[302] Mark Girouard, *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 180.
[303] Howard Pyle, *The Story of King Arthur and His Knights* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1903), 164.
[304] Ibid., 177.

once more tarnished by the caveat that Arthur must in return kill Morgana as punishment for her crimes. Pyle's noble Arthur swiftly rebukes her cruel request and forgives Morgana of her sins against him before Vivien vanishes from his side.

Vivien's essential didactic purpose in Pyle's first book is made explicit following her betrayal of Merlin in one of Pyle's direct addresses to his readers: "God grant it that you may not so misuse the wisdom He giveth you to have, that it may be turned against you to your undoing. For there can be no greater bitterness in the world than this: That a man shall be betrayed by one to whom he himself hath given the power of betraying him."[305] The principal concern of Pyle's tale of Merlin and Vivien is to deter his young male readers from emulating the wizard's reckless misuse of wisdom, but he also subtly hints that there are crucial lessons to be learned from Vivien's actions. Stemming from his Christian conservativism, the first lesson Pyle likely meant to convey through Vivien to his young male readership was simply to "beware of cunning young women". Like Tennyson, Pyle was conscious of the potential threat that the liberalised modern woman posed to his idealised patriarchal social hierarchy. The second lesson Pyle appears to present through Vivien is more intimately connected with the concepts of duty and right choice that encompass the whole of his Arthuriad. For Pyle, dutiful behavior is ultimately a product of socially and spiritually responsible choices and is conveyed in his books by heroic knights like Gawaine and Galahad. To this extent, Vivien's betrayal, and thus her prevailing identity as a villain in Pyle's first book, is a result of her poor choices. Unlike Tennyson's naturally evil Vivien, Pyle's Vivien is not a natural-born villain.[306] Rather, it is her reprehensible decision-making that makes her one: she chooses to betray Merlin, she chooses to let Accolon die (thereby not "lessening" her sin against Merlin), and she intends, albeit with no success, to have Arthur kill Morgana. In each

[305] Ibid., 178.
[306] Tennyson suggests Vivien's evil nature in the lines of *Merlin and Vivien* added in 1874: "born from death was I / Among the dead and sown upon the wind" (*MV*, 44-45).

instance, Vivien is presented with a choice to act dutifully but fails to do so and thereby compounds her sins rather than repents them. Yet despite Pyle's clear condemnation of Vivien's behavior, he curiously—in the spirit of Tennyson—does not punish her for her sins, and she escapes from the first book of his Arthuriad with all the knowledge and power she initially set out to acquire.

Perhaps realising that he had given Vivien too much detrimental yet unpenalised agency in his first book, Pyle relegates her in the following three books of his Arthuriad to the role of Camelot's resident mischief-maker—a wandering brigand and a thorn in the side of questing knights. In *The Story of the Champions of the Round Table*, Vivien tries but fails to turn Percival into stone. In *The Story of Launcelot*, she is the source of the enchanted fountain (derived from either Chretien's *Yvain* or the *Mabinogion*) and tricks passing knights into doing battle with the powerful Knight of the Fountain; when Sir Ewain finally bests the Knight and wins the love of the Lady of the Fountain, Lesolie, Vivien gives him an enchanted ring which makes him forget his victory and his love. In the same book, Pyle's model knight Gawaine seeks out Vivien hoping to "compel her to better conduct", only to be turned by her into a hideous misshapen dwarf.[307] In Pyle's final book, *The Story of the Grail and the Passing of Arthur*, Vivien makes a brief appearance as the disguised tempter of Percival on his quest for the grail. Though still very much an antagonist in the final three books of Pyle's Arthuriad, the severity of Vivien's villainy is diminished by both the comedic nature of her prankish interactions with the knights she encounters and the knights' ability to successfully best her trickery by remaining faithful to their chivalric ideal. And excepting the implicit sexual undertones of her attempted corruption of Percival in Pyle's final book, in the last three books, Vivien is no longer the existential threat to Pyle's idealised social hierarchy

[307] Howard Pyle, *The Story of Sir Launcelot and His Companions* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907), 313.

that problematises her appearance in the first book of the series. Pyle transforms Vivien from a cunning young girl into a magical trickster—comparable to the Norse god Loki or the Greek goddess Eris—and thereby diminishes her role in his stories to just one of the many obstacles which the knights of Camelot must overcome as part of their quests and as a demonstration of their commitment to the order of the entire realm. Though Pyle again does not explicitly punish Vivien for her mischief in his last three books, he communicates that the everyday real-world challenges she represents are necessary character-building hardships that can be overcome by remaining true to admirable principles and committing oneself to social and spiritual duties.

The chief way Pyle counteracts Vivien's troublesome influence in his books is by pitting her against her essential opposite in Nymue, Pyle's chief Lady of the Lake and paragon of womanhood. At certain points in the Arthuriad, Nymue stifles Vivien's treachery directly; she gives Percival a charm which protects him from being turned to stone and later returns Gawaine to his natural human form. In a more indirect manner, Nymue combats Vivien's youthful petulance as the model dutiful woman of Pyle's idealised social hierarchy whose chief purpose is to help Camelot's knights fulfill their quests and guide them along their spiritual journeys. As in traditional Arthurian narratives, Nymue plays a vital role in Pyle's story of Arthur from beginning to end, first guiding him to Excalibur before helming the barge which finally carries him off to Avalon. Sir Pellias particularly benefits from Nymue's helping hand. He obtains from her a ring which makes all those he encounters adore him; later, after Pellias suffers fatal wounds, Nymue restores him to life before making him her sworn knight and, later, romantic partner. Nymue also acts as a practical and quasi-religious spiritual guide to the knights. In Pyle's first book, she leads Gawaine and his retinue by way of a white stag—evocative as a symbol of the Greek Artemis or Roman Diana—through a forest to help the ailing Pellias. In the following three books, the knights follow

Nymue's golden bird towards noble and spiritual objectives: the bird leads Percival to a knight in need of rescuing from Vivien and later brings Gawaine to Merlin's resting place to hear the wizard's prophecy of the grail before guiding him, like the biblical Star of Bethlehem, to the site of Galahad's birth.[308] Lastly, Pyle develops Nymue as the ideal mother figure. Drawing from the medieval French romances, Pyle's Nymue acts as the foster mother of Launcelot. She raises the young knight-to-be alongside Pellias in what Pyle imagines as the ideal home environment: as Nymue plays the nurturing mother to Launcelot, Pellias takes on the role of the chivalrous father and teaches him "all that [is] best of knighthood, both as to conduct of manner, and as to the worthiness and skill at arms". This stable home has a significant impact on Launcelot's personal development, for as Pyle writes, he becomes "the greatest knight in all the history of chivalry".[309] So though Nymue at times proves more magically powerful than Vivien, Pyle indicates that Nymue's most potent demonstration of strength over Vivien ultimately rests in her virtuous neo-Victorian feminine identity as an aid to the knights' success, a reliable spiritual guide, and a doting mother.

The appearance of both Vivien and Nymue in Pyle's Arthuriad suggests that he, like Tennyson, imagined the two enchantresses as distinctive from one another: one an emblem of typical Christian evil, the other an icon of ideal Christian benevolence. Yet, in juxtaposing them as two ends of a didactic moral spectrum, Pyle also appears to suggest that Nymue and Vivien represent two sides of the same symbolic coin, and he further demonstrates this "unity through opposition" in his aesthetic descriptions of both enchantresses. Though Pyle describes both Nymue and Vivien as exceptionally beautiful, their beauty is fundamentally disparate and serves to increase the contrast of their distinctive ethical identities and didactic purposes. Nymue's textual aesthetic expresses maturity, wisdom, and serenity:

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[308] In *The Story of Sir Launcelot*, Pyle mistakenly claims that it was Nymue's bird, not her stag, that leads Gawaine and his retinue out of the forest to assist Pellias (319).

[309] Howard Pyle, *The Story of the Champions of the Round Table* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905), 10.

> her face was like wax for clearness . . . and her eyes were perfectly black and . . . as bright and glistening as though they were two jewels set in ivory. And . . . her hair was like silk and as black as it was possible to be, and so long that it reached unto the ground as she walked. And the lady was all clad in green . . . And around her neck there hung a very beautiful necklace of several strands of opal stones and emeralds, set in cunningly wrought gold; and around her wrists were bracelets of the like sort[310]

In contrast to Nymue's faerie queen visage, Vivien's textual aesthetic indicates a figure of youthful guile and mortal danger, and like Tennyson's enchantress, she is a symbol of the violent and untamable aspects of Nature: always she wears a dress of "flame-colored satin"; her hair is worn tightly coiled and her eyes, though "bright and glistening" like Nymue's, are rather black like coal and shine like those of a snake. Adding to her viper-like countenance, as she ensnares Merlin, Vivien takes on the guise of a "cunning and beautiful spider."[311] Of all the physical attributes that distinguish Pyle's enchantresses, it is his simple use of color that most sets Vivien and Nymue apart and draws an intriguing parallel to Tennyson. Pyle dresses Nymue in green just as Tennyson dresses Vivien in the color of the "satin-shining palm".[312] Yet, that Pyle's Nymue and Tennyson's Vivien are essential opposites, green evidently held opposing symbolic meanings for both men. Tennyson employs green as Pyle employs red, in conjunction with serpent imagery, to amplify the threatening qualities of Vivien that associate her with the brutal and unforgiving attributes of the natural world. For Pyle, Nymue's green dress and accentuating opal and emerald jewelry signify a romanticised view of a more maternal natural world that nurtures and inspires as often as it threatens to destroy. As a trained artist, Pyle would have been exceptionally familiar with color theory, and as such, he would have been aware of the fundamental "complementary" relationship between green and red. Therefore, for all Nymue and Vivien's aesthetic differences, Pyle seems to have conceived through his use of color of an underlying principle of negative complementation which harmonised his two enchantresses: he understood there could be no

[310] Pyle, *Story of King Arthur*, 69.
[311] Ibid., 166, 177; Pyle, *Story of the Champions*, 295.
[312] *MV*, 222.

creation without destruction, no benevolence without violence, no good without evil—no ideal Nymue without an unideal Vivien. Pyle would not be the only author to color code the Vivien character in a meaningful way, and, as discussed later in this chapter, towards the end of World War I, Edwin Arlington Robinson would elevate Vivien's association with the same green and red hues to grander metaphorical heights.

One of the principal features of Pyle's Arthuriad is his accompanying illustrations, and his portraits of Nymue and Vivien reveal more clearly his complex, often overlapping, vision of his two enchantresses. Like all the images in Pyle's books, his black and white portraits of Nymue and Vivien work jointly with his colorful textual descriptions to present more dynamic visions of his enchantresses (figs. 13 and 14). Looking at Pyle's portraits side by side, what immediately strikes the viewer are the uncanny similarities between Nymue and Vivien. Both share the same posture, possess almost identical facial features, and wear the same facial expression, with sharp and pensive eyes looking over their left shoulders. Without further visual context, it would be difficult to distinguish one from the other. Thus, it is only by their contrasting accoutrements that they are discernible: Nymue wears over her brow a simple circlet inscribed with the word "magic" while Vivien wears a circlet twisted into the shape of a cobra, reminiscent of the popular late nineteenth-century paintings of Cleopatra; both enchantresses wear similar elegant dresses and jewelry, though Vivien's neckline is suggestively low-cut; Nymue's hands are soft and relaxed while Vivien's are tense as she grips her snake-tipped wand; the nobility of the swan-like bird—possibly the golden bird—soaring behind Nymue starkly contrasts the dangerously coiled serpents adorning Vivien.[313] Pyle dresses down Vivien and Nimue's physical similarity with plainly coded symbols. He may well have intended his detailed portraits of Nymue and Vivien to

[313] See John William Waterhouse's *Cleopatra* (1887), Alexandre Cabanel's *Cleopatra testing poison on condemned prisoners* (1887), and John Collier's *Cleopatra's death* (1890).

work alongside his textual descriptions in aiding his young readership in their own imaginative developments of what was to be considered as noble and ignoble femininity. Nymue stands as a woman worthy of reverence—stoic and queenlike, yet also demure and deferential, and accentuated by a textual aesthetic that paints her as a dutiful maternal woman. And while Vivien seems to physically mirror Nymue, her suggestive ornamentation coupled with her textual deviousness paints her as a prideful and dangerously seductive young girl, someone that Pyle's young male readers must avoid at all costs if they wish to grow up into honorable men of social distinction and young girls must avoid emulating to save themselves from becoming social outcasts.

Pyle follows many of the conservative textual and illustrative approaches to Vivien that were popular amongst his contemporaries, but he is unique in his treatment of Vivien and Nimue as separate characters with distinct didactic purposes. Where many authors weave the identities of the medieval and Tennysonian Vivien together in their stories, often making her educational purposes ambivalent, Pyle essentially draws out the historically "bad" qualities displayed by the character across a large body of Arthurian legend and places them in Vivien while he concurrently attributes the historically "good" qualities to Nymue. Keeping his young readership in mind, the rationality of Pyle's approach is plainly evident when bearing in mind the didactic intentions of his Arthuriad. Yet considering the historical literary development of Vivien's character more objectively, Pyle's dialectical approach also highlights the trending perception of Vivien in the twentieth century towards a paradoxical figure who could seemingly embody both good and evil simultaneously. As Pyle's textual and illustrative approaches to his dichotomous Vivien and Nymue suggest, it took a sustained conscious effort on the part of the author and the illustrator, particularly in children's literature with explicit educational purposes, to characterise Vivien/Nimue as either good or evil. Such focused effort was needed because the prevailing archetype of the character that

occupied the twentieth-century Anglo-American imagination was becoming ever more defined by an essential dualism elicited by Tennyson's evil Vivien and the medieval enchantresses of Malory and the *Vulgate Cycle* who identify as the noble and maternal Lady of the Lake. However, it was not until the outbreak of World War I that the symbolic potency of Vivien's dualism was more openly expressed in original Arthurian literature.

II: Vivien and Arthurian Drama

The rise in children's Arthurian literature during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century coincided with a sharp increase in the appearances of Arthurian dramas. For much of the nineteenth century, the most popular mode of Arthurian narrative was poetry, either lyrical or narrative. By the 1890s, however, a renewed Anglo-American interest in the theatre brought with it a creative impetus to transpose the Arthurian legend onto the stage. Despite this late-century shift in taste from poetry to drama, Arthurian dramatists primarily looked to the previous era's Arthurian poetry for inspiration. Many nineteenth-century poets shied away from adapting the legend into a dramatic form, yet much of the era's most famous Arthurian poetry is eminently theatrical, and so naturally lent itself to the development of Arthurian drama primarily through its use of dramatic monologue; Arnold's *Tristram and Iseult* (1852), Morris's *Defence of Guenevere* (1858), and Swinburne's *Tristram of Lyonesse* (1882) all make use of the dramatic monologue to great effect, while the twelve poems that comprise Tennyson's *Idylls*, as A. Dwight Culler suggests, are "in one sense all . . . dramatic monologues."[314] The use of dramatic monologue is not the only theatrical quality of such poetry. As Pamela M. Yee notes, "moments of ekphrasis, natural or architectural imagery (recognizably influenced by the aesthetic of pre-Raphaelite painters),

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[314] A. Dwight Culler, *The Poetry of Tennyson* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 241.

and the insertion of songs provide these poets with further opportunities for visual and aural dramatization."[315] Tennyson's handling of these elements proved particularly effective, and as a result, Alan Lupack suggests that no Arthurian text had a greater influence on the development of Arthurian drama in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century than the *Idylls*.[316] Many of the characters and themes from Tennyson's epic, which Henry Kozicki argues can be read as a "tragic drama", were easily woven into dramatic adaptations of the legend, and the melodramatic Vivien was no exception.[317]

Perhaps a further reason why Tennyson's Vivien became a popular model for Arthurian dramatists was that he had treated her as a dramatic figure from the earliest stages of his Arthurian plan. Before settling on the final epic form of the *Idylls*, he entertained other narrative modes including that of a five-act musical masque which he outlined sometime between 1833 and 1840. Though the narrative plan of the masque has little in common with what would become the *Idylls*, Nimuë plays a significant role in two of the five acts, the outlines of which I reproduce here:

> *Third Act*
>
> Oak tomb of Merlin. The song of Nimuë. Sir Mordred comes to consult Merlin. Coming away meets Arthur. Their fierce dialogue. Arthur consults Sir L. and Sir Bedivere. Arthur weeps over Merlin and is reproved by Nimuë, who inveighs against Merlin. Arthur asks Merlin the issue of the battle. Merlin will not enlighten him. Nimuë requests Arthur to question Merlin again. Merlin tells him he shall bear rule again, but that the Ladies of the Lake can return no more. Guinevere throws away the diamonds into the river. The Court and the dead Elaine.
>
> *Fourth Act*
>
> Discovered by Mordred and Nimuë of Lancelot and Guinevere. Arthur and Guinevere's meeting and parting.[318]

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[315] Pamela M. Yee, "Re-presenting Mordred: Three Plays of 1895," *Arthuriana* 24, no. 4, Special Issue on Arthurian Drama (Winter 2014): 4.
[316] Alan Lupack, "The Influence of Tennyson's Poems on Arthurian Drama," *Arthuriana* 24, no. 4, Special Issue on Arthurian Drama (Winter 2014): 80-96.
[317] Henry Kozicki, "Tennyson's 'Idylls of the King' as Tragic Drama," *Victorian Poetry* 4, no. 1 (Winter 1966): 15-20; for further discussion of Tennyson's dramatic propensities see Patricia Ann Carlson, "'The Play's the Thing?' The Drama of Alfred, Lord Tennyson," *Victorians Institute Journal* 4 (1975): 1-12.
[318] See *Poems*, 3:256-257.

Tennyson's masque outline differs greatly from the *Idylls* in many respects, but there are recognisable details that he would carry over into Vivien's narrative in the *Idylls*, including the oak tree, Nimuë's song, and her anger towards Merlin. Also of note is Nimuë's association with Mordred; while she discovers Lancelot and Guinevere with Mordred in the masque, in the *Idylls* Vivien merely tips Mordred off to the lovers' final meeting. Though Tennyson ultimately downplayed the relationship between Vivien and Mordred, they are often characterised in late-nineteenth- and twentieth-century drama as partners in evil and sometimes romantically involved. Tennyson's decision to employ the epical form for his Arthurian story did little to diminish Vivien's dramatic characterisation from the masque. Indeed, there is no better actor in the *Idylls* than Vivien; with effortless skill she shifts between playing the "tenderest-hearted maid" and the scorned lover, while her scathing monologues provide some of the most effective dramatic moments in the whole epic.[319] From conception to realisation, Tennyson imagined Vivien's character as vitally dramatic, and it was his enduring theatrical vision that primed her for subsequent dramatic interpretation.

Before moving onto a discussion of the Arthurian dramas of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, I must briefly return to the dramatic treatments of Vivien already covered in this study. Edgar Fawcett, W. B. Yeats, Ralph Macleod Fullarton, and Richard Hovey all employ Vivien in a dramatic mode, yet each does so in a distinctive manner: Fawcett's farcical Vivien, while one of Camelot's many schemers, is also a victim of nineteenth-century superficial materiality; Yeats casts his Vivien as the fairy-talesque "Goblin Queen", a wicked figure who is ultimately beaten at her own game of manipulation; Fullarton's Vivien is a haughty maid-in-waiting who possesses too much power and cunning for her own good; by far the most original of the four, Hovey's Nimue is nothing less than the embodiment of the vital creative spark that ignites the poetic imagination. As these four

[319] *MV*, 375.

adaptations of Vivien suggest, perhaps no narrative form in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries granted more freedom in exploring Vivien's character than drama. By virtue of the dialogic format of drama, more space could be devoted to the examination of Vivien's psychology and principal motivations. Yet despite the ample flexibility of the dramatic form to accommodate creative liberties, as the works of Fawcett, Yeats, and Fullarton also intimate, there remained an overwhelming instinct in turn-of-the-century dramatists to follow the example of Tennyson's Vivien. Except in rare sympathetic treatments like Hovey's Nimue, Vivien was almost always cast as the principal antagonist.

Emulating Tennyson's characterisation of Vivien as an evil genius, some dramatists accentuated her role as a villain by casting her as the accomplice to the vengeful enterprises of Mordred. Vivien first appears in such a role in William Wilfred Campbell's *Mordred: A Tragedy in Five Acts* (1895). Campbell's play centres around Mordred, Arthur's incest-begotten hunchbacked son, whose eagerness to become acquainted with his father steadily declines into madness following the King's hostile rejection of him. Merlin, having lost all faith in Arthur since his incestuous union, sympathises with Mordred and entreats him to seek out Vivien whom he can wield as "a dagger wherewith to stab this paltry realm".[320] Vivien soon after dispatches the self-exiled Merlin and takes the wizard's place as Mordred's mentor. The two initially enjoy something of a mutual regard for one another as Vivien counsels Mordred on his path towards usurping Camelot's kingship and exploits the fraying threads straining to hold Camelot together, including exposing Launcelot and Guinevere's relationship to Arthur. Vivien and Mordred's relationship becomes strained following Mordred's admission of love for Guinevere, though she reviles him as much as Arthur. Realising her own love for Mordred, and driven by jealousy, Vivien plots to stab Guinevere

[320] William Wilfred Campbell, *Mordred* in *Mordred and Hildebrand: A Book of Tragedies* (Ottawa: J. Durie & Son, 1895), 13.

but is foiled in the final moment by her would-be lover. Yet instead of killing Vivien as punishment, Mordred spitefully rewards her by "crowning" her as his queen while refusing to make her his wife as she desires.[321] Disguised as a page, Vivien follows Mordred into his final battle with Arthur, where she is conclusively rejected by Mordred as he succumbs to his wounds.

The evil spirit of Tennyson's enchantress plainly resides in Campbell's Vivien, yet she, like many characters in the play, is also heavily distilled from Shakespeare's *dramatis personae*. As Benjamin Franklin Fisher IV notes, the "Shakespeareanism" of Campbell's play is exceptionally vibrant, though unique in that it was "passed through a Gothic alembic."[322] For Lee, the clearest example of Campbell's Shakespearean Gothicism resides in Mordred, in whom "we see the suavity, savvy, and hunchbacked deformity of Richard III, the philosophising and tormented indecision of Hamlet, the cold-blooded machinations of Iago, and the monstrosity of Caliban."[323] Alongside Mordred, Vivien appears to be a convincing avatar of Lady Macbeth—arguably one of Shakespeare's most Gothic characters. From the very beginning of Campbell's play, Vivien's identification as Mordred's "dagger" intimately connects her with the murderous Queen of Scots. Vivien often speaks impassioned soliloquies evocative of Lady Macbeth, the plainest instance of which follows her enchantment of Merlin:

> Vivien the devil back to Camelot,
> Vivien the scorned, the dust betwixt [Arthur's] feet,
> Doth back to Camelot where vengeance waits.
> I am resolved to be the villain dire,
> And cunning devil of this present play.
> Then hence to Camelot to achieve mine end.
> I'll shadow Mordred, work upon his ill,
> And mould him creature to my devil's will.[324]

[321] Ibid., 92.
[322] Benjamin Franklin Fisher IV, "King Arthur Plays from the 1890s," *Victorian Poetry* 28, no. 3/4, The Nineties (Autumn – Winter 1990): 168.
[323] Yee, "Re-presenting Mordred," 11.
[324] Campbell, *Mordred*, 30.

As a dramatic descendent of Lady Macbeth, Vivien possesses an even more unsettling self-awareness of her own role as the "cunning devil" of Campbell's play. Just as Lady Macbeth manipulates her husband and Vivien Tennyson's Merlin, Campbell's Vivien seeks to shape Mordred according to her own ambition. Both women are cold and calculating and both are eventually "crowned", though Vivien's "queenship" is essentially meaningless as the product of Mordred's resentment. Vivien experiences a comparable downfall to Lady Macbeth's, though the outcome is much less dramatically affective. Lady Macbeth tragically takes her own life following the assassination of Macduff's wife and children, while Vivien experiences the "death" of her dramatic potency once she becomes infatuated with Mordred—the sudden onset of her love is unconvincing and melodramatic in its masochism as Vivien claims she'll "see [Mordred] crowned, climb he there o'er my body."[325] In contrast to the first half of the play where Vivien fluctuates between acting as the ruthless devil and the sympathetic angel on Mordred's shoulder, by the final scene she has lost her characteristic complexity and is ironically denounced by the malformed Mordred as a grotesque coalescence of clichéd Gothic evils and Tennyson's enterprising serpent-sorceress:

> [a] Viper, incarnate Fiend,
> Not natural, woman, but Ambition framed,
> And all lust's envy. . . .
> A blacker blackness.[326]

Vivien is again paired with Mordred in Graham Hill's *Guinevere: A Tragedy in Three Acts* (1906), a sympathetic retelling of Guinevere and Launcelot's doomed love. Though Hill presents Vivien as Mordred's wife, her characterisation and narrative trajectory differs very little from Campbell's Vivien and even touches on many of the same "Shakespeareanisms". Hill's Vivien similarly plays the role of the Macbethean master manipulator in her quest to become Camelot's queen. Aiming to take the kingdom apart from the inside while Mordred

[325] Ibid., 72.
[326] Ibid., 105.

wages war against Arthur without, Vivien is the chief adversary of Guinevere, who Hill, much like Hovey, characterises as a paragon of perfect human love rather than a sinful adulteress. Vivien's many plots include toying with Launcelot's emotions, framing Guinevere for murder using a poisoned apple which earns Vivien the title of the "second Eve", and personally escorting Arthur to the location of Launcelot and Guinevere's final fateful meeting.[327] Hill's Vivien proves like Campbell's to be the cleverest of Camelot's inhabitants but is again ultimately brought to heel by her own blind ambition and literally, as well as undramatically, fades "into the background" before the tragedy's denouement.[328] Though Hill does not paint Vivien as the hellish fiend of Campbell's play, she exists as an affront to Hill's veneration of idealised twentieth-century free love. Hill makes it no secret that the "marriage" between Vivien and Mordred is as meaningless as Mordred's crowning of Vivien as his "queen" in Campbell's play—it is a relic of an outdated system of relationships of convenience and advantage. Indeed, Vivien and Mordred's "marriage" is one of the greatest ironies in the play—they exhibit none of the idealised intimacy that the unwed Guinevere and Launcelot share, and Vivien is principally at fault for exposing her husband's plots to Arthur as a result of her own selfishness. Hill's Vivien is therefore much the same autonomous and loveless villain that she is in Tennyson, and her marriage to Mordred essentially serves to amplify her own inimicality to Hill's dramatised notion of transcendental human love.

Pairing Vivien with Mordred was not the only way dramatists augmented her role as an antagonist. Stemming from nineteenth- and twentieth-century "Orientalism"—the Western world's exoticisation of the East—Vivien was also cast as an alluring yet very dangerous "oriental" woman. A concept popularised by his 1978 book *Orientalism*, Edward Said writes

[327] Graham Hill, *Guinevere: A Tragedy in Three Acts* (London: Elkin Mathews, 1906), 52.
[328] Ibid., 96.

that the West had progressively become wary of the threat the East posed as its opposite "image, idea, personality, [and] experience". By the twentieth century, he continues, the West took the East to be "a kind of surrogate and even underground self" whose attributes included "sexual promise, untiring sensuality, unlimited desire, [and] deep generative energies".[329] As academically influential as it was culturally divisive, Said's book was widely criticised for its cultural generalisations and emphasis on what Eleonora Sasso describes as an "irreconcilable division between the East and West".[330] Said eventually reconsidered the Orientalist vision set out in his book and highlighted "the plurality of [Western and Eastern] audiences and constituencies" of which he spoke, even admitting "the possibility of common grounds of assembly between them."[331] Recent scholarship has shed further light on both the sympathies and un-sympathies between the East and West in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with Sasso acknowledging the shared sense of wonder that was cultivated by the nineteenth-century excavations at Nineveh and Troy and Sukanya Banerjee noting the exacerbation of East-West geopolitical relations by Britain's imperialist objectives in specific regions.[332] Inspired by contemporary receptions of the East, Victorian and Modernist writers and artists—including Tennyson, Oscar Wilde, Rudyard Kipling, William Holman Hunt, and John Collier—frequently explored oriental settings and discourses in their work. Turn-of-the-century literature and art—particularly that of Britain—mirrored the complexity of public opinion in simultaneously demonising and fantasising about the East. Yet, despite a multitude of creative responses, as Daniel Bivona suggests, the prevailing Western creative perception of the East remained at the turn of the century largely committed to the idea of "the erotic as

[329] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 2, 3, 188.
[330] Eleonora Sasso, "Introduction," in *Late Victorian Orientalism: Representations of the East in Nineteenth-Century Literature, Art and Culture*, ed. Eleonora Sasso (London: Anthem Press, 2020), 2.
[331] Edward Said, "Orientalism Reconsidered," *Cultural Critique*, no. 1 (Autumn 1985): 105-106.
[332] Sasso, "Introduction," 3; Sukanya Banerjee, "The Victorians: Empire and the East," in *Orientalism and Literature*, ed. Geoffrey P. Nash (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 83.

exotic" and vice versa.[333] And so, through the first quarter of the twentieth century the Orient remained a powerfully seductive conceptual construct through which authors and artists could imaginatively engage with popular and private sexual fantasies.

Vivien's dramatisation as an oriental woman at the beginning of the twentieth century can be seen as a result of the broader nineteenth- and twentieth-century Western artistic preoccupation with a romanticised Eastern aesthetic brimming with sensuality. As early as 1863, the Pre-Raphaelite associate Frederick Sandys had painted Vivien as an exoticised oriental woman (fig. 7). Sandys's Vivien is draped in what looks to be a Chinese-inspired red and gold silk shawl, backdropped by a wall of peacock feathers, and holds in her hand a sprig of daphne while a red poppy rests before her on a table. Incorrectly identified by Maureen Whitaker as a rose symbolising "passionate love", the poppy possesses a much darker and deadlier significance, as in the nineteenth century, particularly in Britain, the flower was heavily associated with opium addiction and the Opium Wars in China (1839-1860).[334] In 1876, the architect, artist, and designer John Moyr Smith produced a set of twelve ceramic tiles that depicted various scenes and characters from Tennyson's *Idylls*. Smith's *Vivien* tile (fig. 15) portrays the moment of Merlin's enchantment and notably shows Vivien dressed in stereotypical Middle Eastern or North African clothing and assuming a pose that evokes the belly dances that became popularised in the nineteenth-century Western world by Middle Eastern and North African women over a decade later at the World's Fairs in Paris (1889) and Chicago (1893). As discussed in the previous section, Howard Pyle mirrors the Pre-Raphaelite obsession with the exotic *femme fatale* in his artistic renderings of Vivien as a veritable Cleopatra figure (figs. 13 and 14). Tennyson's Vivien was drawn with an eye

[333] Daniel Bivona, "Orientalism and Victorian Fiction," in *Orientalism and Literature*, ed. Geoffrey P. Nash (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 102.
[334] Muriel Whitaker, *The Legends of King Arthur in Art* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1995), 232.

towards the East as late as 1912, and in one illustrated edition of the *Idylls* Eleanor Fortescue-Brickdale drapes her in the vibrant pelt of a Bengal tiger (fig. 16).

Turn-of-the-century dramatists who characterise Vivien as a mysterious woman of the Orient mould her from many of the same Eastern aesthetic cues as visual artists. Francis Burdett Money Coutts is the first dramatist to explicitly depict Vivien as an inhabitant of the Eastern world in *Merlin*, the first of his trilogy of Arthurian lyrical dramas published in 1897. Coutts's Nivian is a Saracen dancing girl and, along with her sisters, one of Merlin's thralls. Encouraged by Merlin's false promises of freedom, Nivian and her sisters employ mystical dances to lure Gnomes away from their treasure hordes so that Merlin may take the riches for his own. Nivian becomes dismayed when Merlin breaks his promise to free her sisters following Arthur's coronation and is encouraged by Morgan le Fay—who covertly seeks to crown her son Mordred by ensuring Merlin does not prevent the fatal meeting between Arthur and Guinevere—to win the wizard's magic rod and seal him within a cave. Agreeing to Morgan's scheme, Nivian performs a dance for Merlin, he gives up the rod, and she entombs him within one of the Gnomes' treasure hordes.

Coutts draws much attention to Nivian's Eastern identity throughout the play, with Merlin naming her a "Sun-hearted child of the East" and identifying her longed-for homeland as that "of the hornèd moon"—a common symbol of many Near Eastern countries.[335] Yet Nivian's objective geographic identity is quickly supplanted by the subjective Western fascination with an enticing—and highly imagined—depiction of Eastern sexuality, as first evinced by Coutts's identification of Nivian with Oscar Wilde's Salome. While Nivian enchants Merlin with her dance, he claims that

> Herodias' daughter dancing
>   Who danced a life away,
> Could never have matched the glancing

[335] Francis Burdett Money Coutts, *Merlin* in *King Arthur: A Trilogy of Dramas Founded on the Morte D'Arthur of Sir Thomas Malory* (London: John Lane at the Bodley Head, 1897), 30-31.

Of Nivian's feet to-day![336]

Coutts's Nivian does not project the same rapturous sexuality of Wilde's Salome, but she unquestionably touches upon the same idealised heathenistic spirit of the Orient as imagined by Wilde in his play. Perhaps surprisingly, it is under Tennyson's influence that Coutts more plainly develops Nivian's alien sexuality. Nivian's entombment of Merlin coincides with a violent storm, and following the tempest, she "*throws down the rod and clings in terror to* Morgan."[337] This brief moment of stage direction can easily be read as a simple reworking of Tennyson, and that seems likely to have been Coutts's primary intention. However, much can be made about the possible implications of this scene in relation to Nivian's foreign sexuality, as well. In Tennyson's idyll, the moment of Merlin and Vivien's embrace during the storm is implicit of a sexual transgression, though it is importantly for the conservative Tennyson a heterosexual transgression. Coutts's rewriting of Tennyson appears to completely reorient this scene, and so Nivian's sexual identity. There are two ways in which Coutts does this: firstly, Nivian's disposal of Merlin's suggestive rod can be read as a rejection of the domineering male sexuality she and her sisters were subjected to as his thralls; secondly, that Nivian finds shelter in Morgan's embrace during the storm implies, if not an outright sexual attraction, a deeper intimacy than she ever shared with Merlin. Coutts does not suggest that Nivian's possible homosexuality is necessarily illicit or unethical, but as he does with her Eastern identity, he cultivates Nivian's sexual identity as provocatively taboo, presenting her as simultaneously attractive and terrifying. And so, as Yeeyon Im finds with Wilde's Salome, Coutts's Nivian "presents us [Westerners with] our own repressed desire and momentary catharsis of its explosion, followed by social containment" as she finally returns to her distant homeland.[338]

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[336] Ibid., 30.
[337] Ibid., 33; emphasis in original.
[338] Yeeyon Im, "Oscar Wilde's Salomé: Disorienting Orientalism," *Comparative Drama* 45, no. 4 (December 2011): 377.

The process of Vivien's dramatic orientalisation continues in the early twentieth century in Ethel Watts Mumford's fairy-tale fever dream *Merlin and Vivian: A Lyric Drama*, scored by Henry Hadley for chorus, soli, and orchestra. Essentially a retelling of Merlin's entrapment, Mumford's drama is heavily dressed in traditional fairy-tale and idealised Western oriental aesthetics. Vivian is an inhabitant of the mystical fairyland of Avalon who is summoned by the island's queen, Morgan-le-Fay, to aid in her in slaying her mortal enemy Merlin. From her first appearance, Vivian's otherworldliness is accompanied by Eastern symbolism: her hair is "bound with gems", her cheek appears to Merlin to be "like the rose of Persia", and "she bears a jewelled peacock fan."[339] To reach Camelot, Vivian must travel by way of a magic ship which she and Morgan summon using stereotypical Near Eastern paraphernalia such as "golden lamps, / And magic oils of strange perfume", all while singing "ancient songs" and summoning the "Charms of Phœnicia".[340] Morgan provides Vivian with a magic ring which she uses to ensnare Merlin. Under the ring's enchantment, Merlin calls upon the spirits of Ariel, an Apollonian spirit of music and light, and Adrihim, the spirit of the architect of Sueliman's temple, to build Vivian a "glorious dwelling". The product of their labours is the usually Lancelot-associated Castle Joyousgarde, a "Palace of Delight" bedecked in the supremely rich visual, aural, and olfactorial sensualities reminiscent of the frenetically sensual "pleasure-dome" of Coleridge's *Kubla Khan* (1816).[341] The palace's excessive sensuality eventually overwhelms Merlin, and after he drinks from the "cup of Sleep", Vivian weaves a shroud of her hair around him—"like a huge spiderweb of Hate"—and he is left to lie in the palace for a thousand years.[342]

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[339] Ethel Watts Mumford, *Merlin and Vivian: A Lyric Drama* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1907), v, vii.
[340] Ibid., v-vi; Phoenicia was an ancient Semitic maritime civilisation (~3000 BC – 64 BC) located in what is now the Levant region of the eastern Mediterranean.
[341] Mumford, *Merlin and Vivian*, viii; Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Kubla Khan* in *The Complete Poems*, ed. William Keach (London: Penguin, 2004), 250.
[342] Mumford, *Merlin and Vivian*, x.

Mumford accentuates Vivian's Eastern aesthetic in a much more hostile manner than does Coutts. As a result, Vivian does not elicit the kind of forbidden sympathies that Nivian coaxes from her readers. Though Vivian inhabits the fairyland of Avalon, rendered by Mumford as an exceptionally vivid "Isle of Dreams", she is, like Morgan, ironically a sorceress of the "blackest arts". Beneath the veil of her fantasied homeland and oriental ornamentation, Vivian identifies herself as the "hand of Fate" and "Death".[343] She is guarded on her journey not by good-natured spirits but by "all the hosts of blackest hell" and works with "the dark spells of Fairyland."[344] As Vivien's bejewelled peacock fan implies, her Eastern aesthetic is a sparkling façade that masks an objective existential nightmare rather than a subjective erotic fantasy. The orientalism of Mumford's Vivian thus signifies more broadly and more pessimistically than Coutts's Nivian the potential dangers of foreign influence, a point that is further made by Vivian's invocation of the magical "Runes of the Northland" and her posing as the "Princess of Northumberland" upon her arrival at Camelot.[345] And it is Vivian's incongruous mixture of magical unearthliness and real worldliness—of which both conditions are symbolised by her oriental accoutrements—that casts her as demonic and deadly and ultimately unworthy of the reader's emotional and erotic sympathies that are drawn out by Coutts's Nivian.

Vivien's appearance in drama at the turn of the century was limited, and moreover, none of the works in which she appears were produced for stage performance (save for Yeats's rumoured one-off household production of *Vivien and Time*). Yet, the works discussed above reveal a distinguishable pattern of employing Tennyson's enchantress as the model for an exceptionally flexible dramatic figure. Moreover, her dualistic development as both a model villain of singular Western imagination and as a tantalisingly fatal Eastern

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[343] Ibid., v.
[344] Ibid., vi-vii.
[345] Ibid., vi-vii.

persona remains a significant bridge between the demonic Viviens of the nineteenth century and the transcendental Viviens of the twentieth century. Building on Tennyson, Campbell and Hill more firmly entrench Vivien in the tradition of archetypal Western literary villains by intimately associating her with the supreme Arthurian evil in Mordred and invoking to separate degrees the vengeful spirit of Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth. Coutts and Mumford likewise take Tennyson's Vivien to new heights of dramatic villainy, though they do so by disorienting her familiar Western characterisation by way of an alluring Eastern aesthetic. Hardly symbolic of a singular Western fear of Eastern "otherness", however, Coutts and Mumford's oriental aestheticisation of the Vivien character also suggests a Western fixation on deep sensual experience, an experience which it had long suppressed yet yearned to realise. So while the period of Vivien's dramatisation may have been brief and her appearances limited, her dramatists ultimately set the stage for the wartime and post-war treatments of Vivien that more plainly blur the geo-cultural boundaries of East and West.

III. Vivien's Enlightenment in a World at War

By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, the general Anglo-American conception of Vivien remained heavily informed by Tennyson. Whether in poetry, children's literature, or drama, she was largely consigned to the role of the villain, or at the very least the foreign presence who threatened the predominantly conservative social, political, and sexual status quos of the West. By the end of the twentieth century's second decade, Vivien was hardly considered in the same antagonistic terms, and she became virtually unrecognisable in comparison to the prevailing Tennysonian-inspired characters from the previous half-century. There is no definitive explanation as to why Vivien's literary status underwent such a sudden and profound shift. However, two reasons appear to have had a

significant impact on subsequent treatments of her character as the twentieth century progressed: the first is the rise of the Modernist Arthurian movement, out of which came such famous works as Twain's *Connecticut Yankee* (1889), Eliot's *Waste Land* (1922), and White's *Once and Future King* (1938)—Vivien, as well as Tennyson's general influence, is notably absent in each of these texts; the second reason for Vivien's drastic character shift was one that reshaped virtually every aspect of the twentieth century—the outbreak of the First World War. While it would be reasonable to assume that the war encouraged authors of new Arthuriana to bring out the absolute worst in Vivien's character, it surprisingly had the opposite effect. And as the war decimated Europe, Vivien gradually developed into an unexpected beacon of feminine wisdom and love.

The impetus behind Vivien's character shift that coincided with the beginning of the Great War was not widespread. Additionally, the two, yet highly significant, instances of her literary ascendency in the poetry of Wilfrid Scawen Blunt and Edwin Arlington Robinson were naturally overshadowed by a renewed and pervasive interest in the traditional figure of the medieval knight. The vast majority of the British population who participated in the war effort had little to no first-hand knowledge of what war would be like, but as Mark Girouard writes, "during the nineteenth century the upper and much of the middle classes had been increasingly encouraged to believe that a fight in a just cause was one of the most desirable and honourable activities open to man, and that there was no more glorious fate than to die fighting for one's country."[346] This was not a belief learned on a battlefield but taught in classrooms and churches, read in history books about the Napoleonic, Crimean, and Boer Wars, and imagined through romantic stories of brave knights and indomitable kings. British soldiers were encouraged to embody the figure of the "Happy Warrior", first described by Wordsworth in 1807 as a "generous Spirit" with a "singleness of aim" and "peculiar grace"

[346] Girouard, *Return to Camelot*, 276.

and later championed by Henry Newbolt in 1917 as a man of "kindness, humanity, decency, honour, [and] good faith".[347] Tennyson's work had a particularly profound effect on British chivalric attitudes towards the war; poems like *Maud* and *The Charge of the Light Brigade* made their way into the trenches and continued to instil a belief in personal sacrifice for queen and country. The Galahad of Tennyson's 1842 volume likewise inspired many stationed at the front, as the "depiction of a pure youth, whose physical and martial strength flowed casually from his moral and sexual health . . . became emblematic of questing youth" and a perfect model for the fledgling soldier.[348] Therefore, as Girouard concludes, in the early stages of the First World War, "there was nothing to stop [the British] thinking of [the war] in terms of their education—a war of glory, honour and cavalry charges."[349] Once the fighting started, however, this largely literary chivalric education proved essentially futile.

The Great War left much of Europe in ruins and virtually annihilated any vestigial belief in the efficacy of chivalry in Britain (and America, following the country's delayed involvement). Many of the Happy Warriors who went to war with noble and romantic visions of battle were quickly stripped of their spiritual armour by the sheer brutality of machine guns, barbed wire, chemical weapons, and trench warfare. As Hebert Read detailed from the front lines:

> His wild heart beats with painful sobs,
> His strain'd hands clench an ice-cold rifle,
> His aching jaws grip a hot parch'd tongue,
> His wide eyes search unconsciously.
>
> He cannot shriek.
>
> Bloody saliva
> dribbles down his shapeless jacket.

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[347] William Wordsworth, *The Character of the Happy Warrior* in *The Major Works*, ed. Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3, 40, 47; Henry Newbolt, *The Book of the Happy Warrior* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1917), viii.
[348] Rob Gossedge, "Malory in Wartime Britain" in *A New Companion to Malory*, ed. Megan G. Leitch and Cory James Rushton (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2019), 260.
[349] Girouard, *Return to Camelot*, 283.

I saw him stab
and stab again
a well-killed Boche.

This is the happy warrior,
this is he.[350]

The war's effect on the popular Anglo-American perception of chivalry along with the literal and figurative deaths of the Happy Warrior required that a new body of Arthurian literature be written to reflect the age of modern warfare. By the opening salvo of the Second World War the older traditions of Arthurian medievalism had been replaced by a new body of Arthurian texts that frequently displaced Arthur and his knights from a medieval-inspired Camelot brimming with magic by casting them within the context of twentieth-century terms and conflicts.[351] Figures like Tennyson's blameless King and angelic Galahad, once emblematic of an esteemed and idealised manhood, were increasingly usurped by Knights of the Round Table who were not afraid to demonstrate their ruthless strength and bloody their hands on the battlefield.[352]

The impact of the Great War on representations of the traditionally masculine arenas of war and knighthood in new Arthurian texts was immediate, widespread, and enduring. However, the war also had a substantial, if more circuitous, influence on original treatments of Vivien and the revaluation of her feminine identity which stemmed in part from a fundamental shift in the Anglo-American consciousness regarding the status and roles of women in society. As millions of British and American men went off to war, just as many women were called upon at home to support the war effort and fill in those roles usually assumed by men. Women who had been resigned to domestic duties quickly found themselves in factories and offices, participating in every effort from building bombs and

[350] Herbert Read, *The Happy Warrior* in *Naked Warriors* (London: Art & Letters, 1919), 26.
[351] Roger Simpson, "King Arthur in World War Two Poetry: His Finest Hour?," *Arthuriana* 13, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 66-91.
[352] Janina P. Traxler, "Once and Future Saxons: Nazis and Other Dark Forces in the Modern Arthurian Story," *Arthuriana* 11, no. 4 (Winter 2001): 96-107.

planes, to tailoring uniforms, to managing local and national agricultural production. Nurses became full-fledged doctors, ambulance drivers, and x-ray technicians, many of whom were sent directly to the European battlefields. Due in no small part to their immense personal sacrifice, uncompromised diligence, and spirited patriotism, British women experienced breakthroughs in voting rights in 1918 and again in 1928, while American women gained the vote in 1920. Despite the social advancements made by women resulting from the First World War, these milestones did not outwardly influence the female characters of contemporary Arthurian literature as plainly as man's visceral experience with modern warfare moulded many hypermasculine recharacterisations of Arthur and his knights. As such, while the Anglo-American woman's elevated social status is not a direct cause of Vivien's literary transcendence in the second decade of the twentieth century, it is not mere coincidence that the social advancement of Anglo-American women occurred simultaneously with Vivien's evolution from a Tennysonian symbol of the immoral woman into a modern emblem of transcendental feminine virtue.

The first inkling of Vivien's war-time reformation can be found in the poetry of Wilfrid Scawen Blunt. A controversial figure in his time, the Sussex-born Blunt was an outspoken anti-imperialist from an early age and later identified the principal causes of the Great War to be the greed and hypocrisy of Western nations claiming to champion freedom—most notably Britain, Belgium, France, and Germany.[353] Though he garnered a reputation as a dissident, Blunt found himself surrounded by plenty of admirers, many of whom were women of great renown. In 1869, Blunt married Lady Anne Noel, the daughter of Ada Lovelace. Something of modern a Don Juan, he had numerous extramarital affairs, including long-term relationships with one of the last of Victorian London's high-profile courtesans, Catherine "Skittles" Walters, and the Pre-Raphaelite muse Jane Morris. While

[353] Edith Finch, *Wilfrid Scawen Blunt: 1840-1922* (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd., 1938), 342-343.

Blunt's positions on imperialism and war do not correlate with his cavalier love life, his understanding of womanhood is very much informed by his considerations of a pervasive aggressive Western manhood brought about by imperialist policies. As Blunt wrote to a female acquaintance in 1908:

> Women, in my experience, have all the nobler qualities. They are unselfish, kind and patient. I do not quarrel with them because they are illogical and seldom have any sense of proportion: I should like to be a woman myself, if I was ever born again, unless indeed I could be some extremely harmless bird. What I despise in men—men of white races—is their ferocious instincts, their physical fighting courage, their arrogance and self-complacency, while at the same time they are moral cowards, being afraid of pain and afraid to die. Women are far more courageous about both these things, and so are the weaker races of mankind. I should be sorry to see women seriously competing with men in their wickednesses as soldiers or lawyers or politicians. They would make a poor hand of it, and lose their souls as we have lost ours.[354]

Despite some seemingly disparaging remarks of female irrationality and weakness, Blunt undoubtedly placed more faith in the capacities of women than he did men to remedy the moral and spiritual ills of the world. And as the world around him fell further into wartime disarray, he felt, if more privately, that women would always have a significant role to play in preventing humanity from falling into a moral and spiritual wasteland. It is through these beliefs that his Nimue took shape.

In 1914, Blunt published two poems entitled *To Nimue* and *The Wisdom of Merlyn* as part of his *Poetical Works*. While the poems are superficially linked by the figures of Nimue and Merlyn and express a similar theme of matured wisdom, they are essentially standalone works. However, when read together, they elucidate Blunt's complex vision of transcendental womanhood as represented by Nimue. The first of these poems, *To Nimue*, is written from the perspective of an unnamed speaker who is clearly Merlin and reflects on his youthful relationship with the young Nimue. Recognising that he was fooled "by the spell of her fair

[354] Wilfrid Scawen Blunt to Miss Maude Petre, 13 November 1908, in *Wilfrid Scawen Blunt*, by the Earl of Lytton (London: Macdonald, 1961), 15.

child's face", Merlin has worked painstakingly to forget her image: "its innocent wiles, its smiles, its idle sweet girlishness".[355] As he grieves for her, Merlin desires to experience a higher form of love beyond human pleasures that Nimue initially presented to him and embarks on a Romantic's sojourn in nature. It is there that he learns the song of the trees—which he acknowledges in Tennysonian terms as "Time's stateliest measure"—and is reborn a prophet.[356] As crowds gather to hear of his newfound wisdom, he discovers a transformed Nimue amongst the congregation and is instantly taken aback:

> And she stood from the rest apart, and I watched her with
> pitying scorn, and then with a sad surprise,
> And at last with a new sweet passionate joy, for I saw there
> were tears in her eyes.
>
> And she came and sat at my feet, as in days ere our
> grief began.
> And I saw her a woman grown. And I was a prophet no
> more, but a desolate voiceless man.
> And I clasped her fast in my arms in joy and kissed her
> tears as they ran.[357]

Nimue is no longer the wily girl of Tennysonian stock, but a woman matured. Casting his prophetic status aside, Merlin recognises that she has grown to embody the transcendental love he seeks and declares never to "live without love" even if it means the world will forget his songs of wisdom.[358]

Blunt's first poem is one of transformation resulting from maturity, and as such, Nimue's growth from a girl who symbolises sensual human pleasures to a woman who inspires "a new sweet passionate joy" also sees her actively shed the ubiquitous mantle of Tennyson's Vivien that had dominated adaptions of the character over the preceding fifty years. One of the most telling signs of Tennyson's fading influence on new treatments of

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[355] Wilfred Scawen Blunt, *To Nimue* in *The Poetical Works of Wilfrid Scawen Blunt: A Complete Edition*, vol. 1 (London: Macmillan and Co., 1914), 389.
[356] Ibid., 1:389; *To Virgil*, 19.
[357] Blunt, *To Nimue*, 1:390.
[358] Ibid., 1:390.

Vivien can be seen in Blunt's evocation of Eden. Before Blunt's Nimue appeared, many adapters of Vivien followed Tennyson's cue in framing her story in terms of the Edenic narrative, particularly that of the Fall of Man. While Blunt also entertains the theme of Eden, his focus is not on the Fall but rather on the rebirth of an Edenic state, as Nimue and Merlin revel in their rekindled love "as in days ere our / grief began."[359] It is worth noting that Blunt's Merlin remains wary of Nimue's destructive past and towards the end of the poem promises himself that "he shall not be fooled by her" again.[360] However, there is a sense that the subjective "shall not" has been objectively solidified in Merlin through Nimue's maturity into a definitive "cannot"—that is, the kind of matured love and womanhood Blunt's Nimue represents is rooted in transparent spiritual and moral truths that cannot manifest under false guises or immoral actions and feelings. They are the kinds of truths that are representative of an entirely original Edenic state following an age of war and tyranny, the existence of which is, for Blunt, largely dependent on the spiritual and moral redemption of modern humanity through transcendental experiences of love. And it is upon the shoulders of women like Blunt's matured Nimue that this redemption rests.

To Nimue is a pivotal yet subtle moment in Vivien's broader symbolic transformation during the war-torn twentieth century, and the brevity of the poem ultimately prevents Blunt from developing the ideological impetus behind her evolution towards becoming a modern icon of transcendental femininity. Blunt's second poem, *The Wisdom of Merlyn*, therefore acts partly as a continuation of Nimue's symbolic development into an ideal woman. While Nimue neither appears nor is mentioned by name in *The Wisdom of Merlyn*, the poem explicitly develops the themes of girlish love and womanly love introduced in *To Nimue*. As these themes are once again explored from Merlyn's perspective, Blunt's Nimue naturally

[359] Ibid., 1:390.
[360] Ibid., 1:390.

maps herself onto the poem's exegesis of feminine love. *The Wisdom of Merlyn* presents itself as a spiritual handbook composed of Blunt's personal maxims. While the poem interrogates various sources of knowledge and wisdom, Merlyn advises the aspirant wise-person to begin "at the knees of a woman", for "the knowledge of women the beginning of wisdom is."[361] Due to Blunt's piecemeal presentation of his insights in the poem, I present here a consolidation of his reflections on women:

> In youth the ideal woman
> Gazed at afar was a dream, a priceless untouchable prize,
> while she in your arms, too human,
> Mocked you with love. 'Tis an art learned late; alas, and
> the whole by no man.
> . . . .
> Love is a fire. In the lighting, it raiseth a treacherous
> smoke,
> Telling its tale to the world; but anon, growing clear in
> its flame, may be hid by an old wife's cloak,
> And the world learn nothing more and forget the know-
> ledge its smouldering woke.
> . . . .
> The love of a girl is a taper lit on a windy night.
> Awhile it lightens our darkness, consoles with its pure
> sudden flame, and the shadows around it grow white.
> Anon with a rain-gust of tears it is gone, and we blink more
> blind for the light.
> . . . .
> In youth it is well thou lovest. The fire in thee burneth
> strong.
> Choose whom thou wilt, it kindleth; a beggar-maid or a
> queen, she shall carry the flame along.
> Only in age to be loved is best; her right shall repair thy
> wrong.[362]

As in *To Nimue*, Blunt's principal occupation in *The Wisdom of Merlyn* is the development of feminine love in the pursuit of the wise and happy life. Each of the above stanzas shows a uniformity of progression, beginning with the consideration of love in the context of an initial youthful or "lighting" stage before ending on a matured reflection of

[361] Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, *The Wisdom of Merlyn* in *The Poetical Works of Wilfrid Scawen Blunt*, vol. 2 (London: Macmillan, 1914), 455-456.
[362] Ibid., 2:459-464.

love. The same progression can also be seen operating on the set of stanzas as a whole. In the first stanza, the vision of the ideal woman is held at bay by the "mockeries" of a sensual, juvenile feminine love evocative of the empty affection Tennyson's Vivien exhibits towards Merlin. While this kind of love proves for Blunt to be only a superficial mask, it nonetheless provides the essential spark needed to cultivate ideal feminine love. As Blunt notes, the initial flame of girlish love is delicate despite its awesome potential to enlighten and can easily be destroyed; the initial flame may go wholly unnoticed throughout one's life before being snuffed out by old age, or it may be quickly extinguished in youth by a blinding torrent—a Tennysonesque "rain-gust"—of sensual pleasure and unbridled emotion. Blunt arrives at the conclusion that the first spark of love must be carefully kindled from the beginning and that the ultimate womanly love is "an art learned late"—as Merlyn learns from the mature Nimue—, though it can never be understood completely on a human level. Those wise in love must therefore resign themselves to be "content with the / unrevealed."[363] The mystical nature of feminine love finally leads Blunt to locate his complex vision of ideal womanhood—encapsulated by Nimue—within the archetypal figure of the Earth Mother, and he lastly entreats all wisdom-seekers to

> Lean thy lips on the Earth; she shall bring new peace
> to thy eyes with her healing vesture green.
> Drink once more at her fount of love, the one true hippocrene.[364]

In these penultimate lines Blunt roundaboutly solidifies Nimue as a symbol of ideal womanhood guided by love and in doing so sets the character of Vivien on a twentieth-century ascent towards becoming a grander symbol of hope in a world at war.

Had Blunt's transcendental vision of Nimue been the only one to appear around the time of the Great War it would be easy to write it off as an isolated and inconsequential

[363] Ibid., 2:471.
[364] Ibid., 2:471.

development. However, less than two years after the publication of Blunt's poems, the American poet Edwin Arlington Robinson brought Vivien further into the realm of divine femininity. By no means a household name in the present era, Robinson was one of the most highly-regarded poets in America during the first quarter of the twentieth century, and his trilogy of long Arthurian poems—comprised of *Merlin* (1916), *Lancelot* (1920), and *Tristram* (1927)—have continued to enjoy a healthy critical respect since their publications due in large part to Robinson's rich psychological treatments of the legends. While Robinson's poems are essentially products of his own imagination, he drew narrative inspiration primarily from Malory and S. Humphreys Gurteen's *Arthurian Epic* (1895), which includes a summary of the *Vulgate Estoire*; the long poem format as well as the employment of the legend to express modern concerns were likely derived from Tennyson. Like Blunt's poems, Robinson's trilogy does not present a linear narrative and it is cohesive only insofar as each poem plays on a similar set of dualistic themes, particularly those of despair and hope, old and new world order, and the fundamental relationship between man and woman. Robinson explores the universal ramifications of twentieth-century conflict and sexual inequality in each of his three poems. Yet it is through his characterisation of Vivian in *Merlin* that Robinson most poignantly communicates both his anxieties over the apocalyptic potential of the First World War and his hope for a future universal consciousness of womanhood that will lead to humanity's ultimate redemption.

The Great War had a profound effect on Robinson. As Scott Donaldson writes, the poet expected the outcome of the conflict to result in "nothing less than the destruction of western civilisation."[365] Though an entire ocean away from the battlefield, Robinson was acutely aware of the catastrophic effects the war would have on the world's social and

[365] Scott Donaldson, *Edwin Arlington Robinson: A Poet's Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 337.

political landscapes, and like Blunt, he believed that the West and its hypocritical male leadership was the root cause of the conflict. As Herman Hagedorn writes, Robinson perceived that his "age was crumbling . . . because the men who might have had the vision to guide it were irresponsible or trapped by their own passions, betraying what they most cherished."[366] It was under this grim outlook that Robinson, like Tennyson, found the Arthurian legend to be an apt narrative mode through which he could express his concerns about his own age. Unlike Tennyson, however, Robinson never considered Camelot to be a medieval paradise lost—a symbolic relic of a more perfectly ordered human existence. Rather, Camelot presented itself to him as a mirror image of a static Western world that had long been blinded by its own reckless ambition and would inevitably deteriorate under the negligent leadership of ideologues like Arthur. As the Great War proved, such fractured world orders would ever incur both tangible and intangible costs that could not be repaid, a reality Robinson laments in *Lancelot*:

> for ourselves,
> And all who died for us, or now are dying
> Like rats around us of their numerous wounds
> And ills and evils, only this do I know—
> And this you know: the world has paid enough
> For Camelot.[367]

Hardly ignorant of human history, Robinson was well aware that "Another Camelot and another King" would inevitably take the place of the old order.[368] But in this concession he also found reason for optimism in that future societies could and *would* be better for all the pain and strife borne by the past. The pessimism of Robinson's Arthurian poems is therefore underscored by a faint yet vital ember of hope, and as Robinson wrote to a friend in anticipation of the perceived tragedy of *Merlin*: "You may still call me an evangelist of ruin

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[366] Herman Hagedorn, *Edwin Arlington Robinson* (New York: Macmillan, 1938), 306.
[367] Edwin Arlington Robinson, *Lancelot* (New York: Thomas Seltzer, 1920), 150.
[368] Ibid., 150.

when you read it, but you mustn't forget the redemption—even if you don't see it."[369] War darkened Robinson's worldview, but as Hagedorn notes, in the darkness "there was a Light . . . and it would survive, [even though] the darkness would be terrifying."[370]

Robinson primarily associated this hopeful "Light" with the vital essence of womanhood. But as he acknowledged in his poem *John Gorham*, humanity had yet to discover "the way to find" this life-affirming essence.[371] Despite a firm faith in this vital femininity, Robinson's vision of a redemptive female spirit was, like Blunt's, frequently at odds with his understanding of women in the real world. He maintained an anachronistic, almost chivalric, attitude towards women throughout his life and, as Chard Smith writes,

> in real life, [Robinson's] feelings [about women] conformed to the Victorian stereotype. He could pity the "fallen," the poor, and the outcast. But if a respectably placed woman took her fate in her hands, she must take her own chances. Likewise in conformance to the Victorian double standard, the men involved did not suffer his disapproval as did the women. On the other hand, the nearest to intolerance of which he was capable fell on men who in any other respect were guilty of the smallest failure of consideration for their women.[372]

Similar to Tennyson, Robinson balanced a progressive poetic ideal of womanhood with an outward conservativism that rebuked liberal female behaviour as often as it revered woman's potential to elevate humanity's social and spiritual consciousness. And though he could not deny man's role in keeping women subdued in the modern age, he also felt that women were too often at odds with their own sex. As Esther Willard Bates—Robinson's frequent copyist—recalls, "Robinson had a fixed conviction of woman's inhumanity to woman. The feline instinct, he felt, was invariably present, and he was generally looking for it. He suspected all women of guile, innocent guile to be sure, but guile. He thought they all had

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[369] Edwin Arlington Robinson to Jean Ledoux, 30 July 1916, in *Selected Letter of Edwin Arlington Robinson*, ed. Ridgley Torrence (New York: Macmillan, 1940), 97.
[370] Hagedorn, *Robinson*, 306.
[371] Edwin Arlington Robinson, *John Gorham* in *Collected Poems of Edwin Arlington Robinson* (New York: Macmillan, 1937), 14.
[372] Chard Smith, *Where the Light Falls: A Portrait of Edwin Arlington Robinson* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 51.

sharp tongues, whether or not they were in use at the moment."[373] Robinson therefore perceived that women were partly responsible for their own continued social immobility. Despite this perception, he cared very little about what woman's status amounted to in real world terms and socioeconomic status. As Sybil Korff Vincent claims, Robinson "was not concerned with the superficial position of women in society. He would not have lifted a pen for a hundred Equal Rights Amendments. His vision went beyond the political, economic, and social structures, right into the core of the woman's problem."[374] As Vincent suggests, Robinson did not simply reject the idea of equal rights for women, yet he considered that any systemic changes would only provide illusory remedies to the persistent devaluation of women that he saw so deeply engrained within collective human consciousness. Thus, he believed that the woman's problem would not be solved by new laws and regulations or in climbing the socioeconomic ladder but rather in dispelling the widespread belief in woman's natural inferiority to man. Human consciousness required a new spark of enlightenment, and it could only be lit by what Robinson identifies in *Merlin* as "the torch of woman"—an unquenchable flame of vital spiritual love that burns within women like Vivian.

Robinson's *Merlin* is a tale of two worlds that stand in stark contrast to one other: that of a time-ravaged Camelot, where following the discovery of Lancelot and Guinevere it has become "a phantom town of many stillnesses" where a dejected Arthur isolates himself in his chambers and the knights indulge in vice and blame each other for the kingdom's impending doom, and that of Vivian's timeless Broceliande, a static Edenic paradise and veritable Tennysonian "Palace of Art" that is completely closed off from the outside world.[375] Merlin

[373] Esther Willard Bates, *Edwin Arlington Robinson and His Manuscripts* (Waterville: Colby College Library, 1944), 29.
[374] Sybil Korff Vincent, "Flat Breasted Miracles: Realistic Treatment of the Woman's Problem in the Poetry of Edwin Arlington Robinson," *Markham Review* 6 (1976): 15.
[375] Edwin Arlington Robinson, *Merlin* (New York: Macmillan, 1917), 4; See also W. R. Thompson, "E. A. Robinson's Palace of Art," *New England Quarterly* 43, no. 2 (June 1970): 231-249; Thompson does not make an explicit connection between Robinson and Tennyson, but he may have taken this connection for granted given the popularity of Tennyson's poem.

finds himself in a unique position in that he is able to freely move between the two domains, though he does so with a heavy conscience. Despite his deep attachments to Arthur and Camelot, Merlin is left forlorn by his final divination of the kingdom's collapse and further haunted by the notion that he has seen too much of the world in life and through his visions for any mortal man to bear. He therefore resigns himself to be "buried alive" in Broceliande with Vivian—to live out his days in romantic love, sensuous pleasure, and mindful ease.[376] For ten years Merlin and Vivian enjoy each other's amorous company and the fruits of Broceliande's beauty. During this time, Merlin slowly comes to realise that his ties to mortal duty and the temporal reality of Camelot ultimately bar him from living an indefinite life of bliss with her free from social responsibility. As his guilt begins to fester, Broceliande becomes for Merlin a kind of purgatorial prison, all the more emphasised by its hellish "gate of iron, / Wrought heavily and invidiously barred" and Vivian's own description of her domain as his "prison yard".[377] The illusion of euphoric romance is soon shattered for Vivian, as well, as she, like Merlin, admits to have "[seen] too much" of the world before her involuntary exile from Camelot. The inhuman wisdom each possesses has ultimately left them alone in the world, and she further declares herself to be Merlin's "punishment / For making kings of men who are not kings" while he is likewise her punishment "For living out of Time and out of tune / With anything but you."[378] As the reality of their temporal incompatibility sets in, Vivian grows weary of Merlin and, recognising that neither Camelot nor Broceliande can accommodate him any longer, he sets out for lands undiscovered, lamenting the fact that "much is lost / Between Broceliande and Camelot"—that Arthur's principled world of duty could not reconcile itself with Vivian's vital world of sense, emotion, and love.[379]

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[376] Robinson, *Merlin*, 54.
[377] Ibid., 56, 95.
[378] Ibid., 99.
[379] Ibid., 163.

As Merlin's parting words intimate, the overriding tragedy of Robinson's poem speaks to humanity's inability to integrate the kind of liberating feminine love Vivian represents into a universal consciousness that was still in Robinson's time submissive to dogmatic ideologies rooted in patriarchal precepts and inflexible commitments to those ideologies. Robinson believed, like Blunt, that humanity's continued denial of such vital feminine love would only lead to further global conflict and individual disillusionment with life itself. But as always, Robinson remained steadfast in his optimism regarding the ability of future generations to reconcile the cold stoicism of the masculine consciousness with the life-affirming and ameliorative warmth of the feminine consciousnesses, and he held a firm faith in "two fires" that he believed would in time enlighten the world: that of "the light that Galahad found" and that of "the torch of woman".[380] As Robinson more richly develops his idea of "the light that Galahad found" in *Lancelot*, I will only go so far as to say here that this light represents for him an intensive spiritual awakening, the results of which are a renewed sense of humility and a more fervent commitment to a spiritual life. Robinson's "torch of woman" is a much more ambiguous concept, and due to the incongruity of Vivian's rich characterisation in the context of her static domain of Broceliande it can be difficult to decipher the essence of this flame.

There are instances in *Merlin* where Robinson attempts to unveil Vivian's feminine spirit, yet these moments only ever amount to vague ideological descriptions, as in Merlin's puzzling observation that Vivian somehow represents "everything":

> She being Beauty, Beauty being she,
> She being Vivian, and so forever.[381]

This circular definition is followed by one that comes surprisingly from Arthur who, as Merlin relates to Vivian, "almost" sees her for what she is, that is,

[380] Ibid., 154,166.
[381] Ibid., 86.

The beauty of all ages that are vanished,
Reborn to be the wonder of one woman.[382]

Such descriptions of Vivian as Beauty incarnate naturally reaffirm the attributes of femininity that Robinson sees as principally fuelling the torch of woman, particularly those of a transcendental love infused with passion and sensuality and an intuitive, distinctly feminine, wisdom. However, these descriptions ultimately leave the deeper significance of Robinson's Vivian somewhere beneath the exceedingly broad and indefinite umbrella of Beauty. Yet, that Robinson identifies Vivian as Beauty incarnate, it is necessary to look towards the symbolism of Vivian's aesthetic in *Merlin* to reveal her essence more completely. For it is through her aesthetic, specifically her colour association with green, red, and gold, that the essence of Robinson's torch of woman shines brightest.

Before exploring the significance of Robinson's colourisation of Vivian, a brief survey of the character's colour association in previous literary and artistic works is necessary. Tennyson was the first to give significant symbolic weight to Vivien's colouration, dressing her in a samite robe of a "colour like the satin-shining palm" with an accompanying "twist of gold" in her hair and "rosy lips of life and love".[383] Her green-hued dress can be read in terms of her association with the natural world, but it can also be regarded as an expression of the phrase "green with envy" because she covets Merlin's power; the twist of gold accentuates her serpentine quality while also conveys a rich physical allurement and grandeur; lastly, her rosy lips plainly suggest vitality, particularly that of sexual vitality. Considered together, Vivien's green, red, and gold hues symbolise a character of sublime power and attraction, both in a physical and psychological sense. Many authors and artists appear to have drawn from Tennyson's triplicate colour palette for Vivien, though each employs varying degrees of hue which give way to occasional divergences in symbolic

[382] Ibid., 107.
[383] *MV*, 219, 222, 844.

meaning. Paintings of Vivien provide the most express examples of this colour palette at work: Frederick Sandys adorns Vivien opulently in red and gold with peacock feather accents (fig. 7); Edward Burne-Jones first dresses Vivien as well as Merlin in reddish-gold garments in *Merlin and Nimue* (1861), redresses the pair in bluish-green robes in *The Beguiling of Merlin* (1874), and finally puts her in red and him in green in the *Witches' Tree* (1882) (figs. 4-6); for her illustrations of the *Idylls*, Eleanor Fortescue-Brickdale drapes Vivien in a tiger pelt with green lining and reddish-gold skirts; she also depicts her in a green leaf-patterned dress which is accentuated by her fiery red hair and a gold circlet (fig. 16 and 17). Turning to Vivien's literary adaptations, Yeats draws attention to her roseate fingers in *Time and the Witch Vivien* as they swirl the water in her fountain filled with greedy gold carp; Hovey's Nimue dons radiant undergarments of roseate yellow and is perpetually enveloped in the faint glow of electric-yellow light; Pyle employs green and red to great moral and didactic effect, with his maternal green-clad Nymue standing in stark contrast to devious red-robed Vivien; as described above, Blunt's Nimue takes her final form as the Earth Mother in her "healing vesture green"; and a final example, Alan Seeger, an American ex-pat, poet, and soldier who was killed in the Great War, dresses his earthly Vivien in robes of "gold and green and gules [red]" in the eponymous sonnet published in 1916.[384]

Robinson's Vivian in a sense encapsulates the character's entire colour tradition since Tennyson, fluctuating seamlessly between green and red garments all the while being enveloped by golden light and scenery, yet almost no critical attention has been paid to her aesthetic significance. Only the literary editor William Stanley Braithwaite has commented in more-than-passing detail on Robinson's colouring of Vivian, writing shortly after *Merlin*'s publication that

> Her entire garmenture . . . [is] prophetic . . . the symbols clashing a sort of cloth-of-gold pageantry of ancient Britain, but the translation of these symbols [reveals] the

[384] Alan Seeger, *Vivien* in *Poems* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916), 86.

> foundation and fact of the shuddering and shocking catastrophe of the Great War . . . The modern world had gone on before our very gaze covering up the bones of its appalling purpose for war and disaster with every color of moral, political and economic deception until circumstance forged the arrival of the ripe hour for the loosening of the thunderbolt.

Robinson wholeheartedly disagreed with Braithwaite's assessment of Vivian and wished that the editor "[hadn't written] such formidable long sentences, or [found] such world-shaking significance in the colors that Vivian put on to make Merlin take notice before she got tired of having him around."[385] While Robinson's dismissal of any deeper meaning behind Vivian's colouration warrants consideration, his habit of downplaying the symbolism within his own poetry makes this rebuttal largely unconvincing. And as her richly coloured past—and future, soon to be discussed—suggests, Robinson's colouring of Vivian participates in a grander mytho-historical tradition of colour symbolism, a tradition that, rather than rejecting outright, he simply may not have been fully aware of.

Merlin's first day with Vivian in Robinson's poem is an intensely psychochromatic experience. Making his way through Broceliande, he discovers her slowly circling a fountain umbrellaed by the forest boughs. Through the "rays of broken sunshine" slanting through the trees Merlin perceives the verdantly-dressed Vivian to be "a bit of living green / That might have been a part of all the green" surrounding her.[386] This initial green-hued vision of Vivian leads Merlin to compare her to a "slim cedar", much to her own amusement.[387] Yet this vision also has a profound effect on Merlin's awareness of her transcendental feminine potential, and accentuated by her illuminated verdancy, he at once perceives that "her beauty and her grace / Made passing trash of empires".[388]

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[385] Braithwaite's and Robinson's remarks appear in Bates's *Edwin Arlington Robinson and His Manuscripts*, 6-7.
[386] Robinson, *Merlin*, 60.
[387] Ibid., 63.
[388] Ibid., 61.

As day becomes night on Merlin's first day in Broceliande, Vivian sheds her green vesture and enrobes herself in a red garment of tantalising sensuality:

> a fragile sheath
> Of crimson, dimmed and veiled ineffably
> By the flame-shaken gloom wherein she sat,
> And twinkled if she moved . . . .[389]

Merlin's perception of Vivian is instantly transformed in the wake of her colour change. No longer does she seem to him the slim cedar bathed in the enlightening green and gold hues of daytime, and in her twinkling crimson dress and the sultry duskiness of night she blooms into

> a flower of change and peril
> That had a clinging blossom of warm olive [skin]
> Half stifled with a tyranny of black [hair],
> And held the wayward fragrance of a rose
> Made woman by delirious alchemy.[390]

Embracing the darker essence of the poppy she emulates, the red Vivian is dangerous yet all the more enticing for being so. Her sensuality is suffocating and seethes with as much unrealised feminine potential as the beauty and grace of the green Vivian, though it is a potential that Robinson considers is as likely to bring about perilous change as it is an experience of sublime pleasure—in this, Robinson's red Vivian to a certain degree plays on the predominant characterisations of Vivien since Tennyson. Just as gold enhances the green Vivian's natural beauty to near divinity, so too does it amplify the red Vivian's allurement. As she sits down with Merlin to a lavish supper, each raise "a golden cup for a golden moment", and over the gilded brims he perceives that Vivian's eyes become like fire, making "fuel of the night / Surrounding her, [shooting] glory over gold".[391] For a long while Merlin remains fixated on this transcendental red-gold vision of Vivian, only to be startled by another colourful vision, this time of Camelot's impending doom:

> There came
> Between him and the world a crumbling sky

[389] Ibid., 75-76.
[390] Ibid., 76.
[391] Ibid., 88-89.

Of black and crimson, with a crimson cloud
That held a far off town of many towers.
All swayed and shaken, till at last they fell,
And there was nothing but a crimson cloud
That crumbled into nothing, like the sky
That vanished with it, carrying away
The world, the woman, and all memory of them . . . .[392]

While Merlin's crimsoned visions of Vivian and Camelot seem to be bound by their apocalyptic symbolism, there is a discrepancy between these visions in that Vivian's sensuality, intensified by the smouldering dusky atmosphere of Broceliande, provides Merlin with a tranquil, comforting, and ultimately life-affirming sensual experience. It can be thought that a red Vivian and a red Camelot symbolise two different states of being, with the former representing glorified pleasure and the latter epitomising terrible pain. Therefore, as Robinson suggests, Vivian's sensuality is as essential to her feminine potential as are her beauty and grace—that is to say, to borrow from traditional colour theory, her "red" nature is not contradictory but rather complementary to her "green" nature.

But Robinson knew all too well that the pleasurable state the red Vivian symbolises, though essential to human experience, was not a state to indulge in indefinitely, as to do so would inevitably lead to widespread complacency and subsequent social ruin as the Great War was proving in his own time. And so, Merlin's overriding perception of Vivian becomes that of her in green. On "one golden day" as Merlin prepares to take his final leave from Broceliande, he once more finds Vivian at her fountain, again clothed in green. He experiences the same transcendental vision of beauty and grace from their first meeting and proclaims:

I'd have you always all in green . . .
. . . .
All green, all wonderful . . . .[393]

[392] Ibid., 91.
[393] Ibid., 111-112.

As I have suggested above, the great tragedy of *Merlin* is also Robinson's universal tragedy of human consciousness, and it is espoused by Arthur's inability to assimilate Vivian, in all her beauty, grace, and vital sensuality, into his kingdom of cold duty and (often misguided) reason. Thus Camelot, like Robinson's tumultuous age, collapses into the red-black ruin of bitterness and war because it never experiences, let alone entertains the idea of the verdant life-affirming wondrousness Vivian represents.

Lending further credence to the symbolic significance of Vivian's colouration in Robinson's *Merlin*, it is necessary to point out that Robinson was not the only one in his time to describe the vibrant potentiality of the universal feminine spirit in terms of colour. In his 1931 book *Apocalypse*, D. H. Lawrence presents a compelling psycho-spiritual narrative of the "green" and "red" essences of femininity through his exploration of a universal symbol with which the character of Vivien had become intimately familiar since Tennyson's idyll first appeared—the dragon. While Lawrence's *Apocalypse* does not speak directly to or about Vivien, his discussion of the dragon in its various chromatic shades as a symbol of the transcendental feminine spirit further illuminates the significance of Robinson's colouration of Vivian and helps bridge the gap between Robinson's Vivian who bears the "torch of woman" and the mystical Viviens of Dion Fortune and John Cowper Powys who are the focal points of the next chapter.

The last of Lawrence's major works, *Apocalypse* is an impassioned criticism of Western social, political, and religious structures in the aftermath of the First World War. Similar to Blunt and Robinson, Lawrence largely attributed the outbreak of the war to a general Western psychological discord springing from a hegemonic Christian foundation. It appeared to him that the Western mind in its quest for spiritual salvation had committed itself too much to the Christian ideal of self-sacrifice, particularly the kind of vehement martyrdom preached in the Book of Revelation. The doctrine of love that underpinned altruistic Christian

teachings was therefore a mere "evasion" of the real spiritual quest purported in Revelation, a quest which manifested as the "undying will-to-power in man" competing to behold the spirit's "final triumph."[394] Lawrence perceived that the spiritual quest became the driving force behind the development of hegemonic order in the West, and the competition to claim "salvation" ultimately led to catastrophic conflicts like the Great War. The greatest cost of the Western mind's over-commitment to spiritual matters was ultimately for Lawrence the repression of its sensual instincts, what Jae-Kyung Koh identifies as "the deep natural energies of man."[395] Lawrence located these energies most clearly in pre-Christian pagan religions, primarily through the symbol of the "great goddess of the east", or the Great Mother.[396] Once revered as a symbol of universal vitality, he perceived that the Christian tradition of Revelation had consciously demonised the goddess—and by implication all womankind—as the Babylonian Whore as part of a wider effort to alter sexual power dynamics in such a way that made patriarchal order seem naturally and historically ordained. In doing so, the Western mind had literally and symbolically corrupted and shackled its own life-affirming sensuous nature. As Lawrence believed, much like Blunt and Robinson, true salvation could only be found in the liberation of the feminine spirit.

The symbol of the dragon underlies Lawrence's conception of the feminine spirit in that it is similarly a universal "symbol of the fluid, rapid, startling movement of life within us. That startled life which runs through us like a serpent, or coils within us potent and waiting".[397] Yet stemming from the pervasiveness of symbols like the deceitful Edenic serpent and the calamitous dragon of Revelation, this terrifying serpentine energy has in the Western mind become strongly emblematic of violence, destruction, and sexual desire, often

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[394] D. H. Lawrence, *Apocalypse* in *Apocalypse and the Writings on Revelation*, ed. Mara Kalnins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 67.
[395] Jae-Kyung Koh, "D. H. Lawrence and the Great War," *Neophilologus* 87 (January 2003): 154.
[396] Lawrence, *Apocalypse*, 120.
[397] Ibid., 123.

in association with woman—Tennyson's Vivien being a prime example. For Lawrence, this is the essence of the red dragon, or "the dragon in his evil or inimical aspect . . . . The red dragon is the great 'potency' of the cosmos in its hostile and destructive activity."[398] Lawrence posits that the red dragon is the oldest of dragon symbols and that at the dawn of history this dragon was brilliant, gilded red. Like the fiery eyes of Robinson's red-gold Vivian, this vermillion dragon radiated glory, and so it became the emblem of heroes and kings—to which the famous crest of Pendragon can attest.[399] Once universally revered, this dragon lost its heroic meaning and divine lustre as it was progressively demonised until it took the form of the red dragon of Apocalypse.[400] Countering the red dragon is that of the green, which Lawrence identifies from Eastern myth and religion as "the dragon in his good aspect of life-bringer, life-giver, life-maker, vivifier"; the green dragon, sparkling gold and shining like an emerald, is also representative of the "good potency of the beginning of the Christian era" before the true meaning of the Logos became misconstrued in the modern Western mind.[401] As Robinson's doomed Camelot never comes to know the vital spirit of the green Vivian, so Lawrence admits that "Europe has never known the green dragon."[402]

Though the dragon is a universal symbol, Lawrence suggests that "it is woman who falls most absolutely into the power of the dragon" for two reasons: the first comes through his identification of the symbols of the dragon and the woman as the two primordial "wonders" of the universe; the second stems from what he perceives as woman's ubiquitous association with the dragon throughout world mythology.[403] Regarding the Western tradition, Lawrence locates the modern association of the woman with the dragon in the suppressed

[398] Ibid., 125.
[399] In Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain* (London: Penguin, 1966) the red dragon is the principal symbol of Britain while the gold dragon represents the house of Pendragon (172-173, 248). The collective red-gold dragon can therefore be read as symbolic of Arthur's reign over Britain.
[400] Lawrence, *Apocalypse*, 127-128.
[401] Ibid., 124-125.
[402] Ibid., 127.
[403] Ibid., 123, 125.

understanding of the vivifying Logos of early Christianity presented through the stories of Eden and Revelation. He writes:

> Today, the best part of womanhood is wrapped tight and tense in the folds of the old Logos, she is bodiless, abstract, and drive by a self-determination terrible to behold. A strange "spiritual" creature is woman today, driven on and on by the evil demon of the old Logos, never for a moment allowed to escape and be herself. The evil Logos says she must be "significant", she must "make something worth while" of her life. So on and one she goes, making something worth while, piling up the evil forms of our civilisation higher and higher, and never for a second escaping to be wrapped in the brilliant fluid folds of the new green dragon.[404]

Lawrence perceives that the modern woman has become the avatar of biblical evil as a result of the widespread belief in the corrupted Logos; unlike modern man, her will-to-power is not noble but looks rather self-indulgent, and like Eve under the influence of the serpent, she is generally considered to be the root of civilisation's principal troubles and the main hindrance on the quest towards spiritual salvation. The modern doctrine of utility requires that she be of practical value to society—this is essentially the problem faced by Robinson's Vivian. However, woman, like man, must often resort to expedient methods and schemes, but in doing so she accrues most of the blame for perpetuating the world's evils. Thus, modern woman is not only tormented by the influence of the hostile red dragon, but also by what Lawrence identifies as "the grey little snakes of modern shame and pain".[405] As if to echo the desire of Robinson's Merlin to have Vivian always in green, Lawrence ultimately petitions the spirit of the green dragon for salvation: "Oh lovely green dragon of the new day, the undawned day, come, come in touch, and release us from the horrid grip of the . . . old Logos! . . . shed these horrible . . . sheaths off our women, let the buds of life come nakedly!"[406] As with Robinson's universal call to humanity to carry forth "the torch of woman", Lawrence's impassioned plea did not receive an immediate response in the real

[404] Ibid., 126.
[405] Ibid., 126.
[406] Ibid., 127.

world. However, by the middle of the twentieth century, the torch was once more picked up by Dion Fortune's Vivien le Fay Morgan and John Cowper Powys's Nineue.

The first two decades of the twentieth century witnessed Vivien becoming more defined in the Western imagination, both in terms of physical appearance and psychological meaning. Following Vivien's chaotic nineteenth-century rebirth, turn-of-the-century artists and dramatists moulded the previous era's embryonic Vivien into a more concrete feminine form and coloured her with a personality that combined contemporary interpretations of angelic maternal femininity with the terrifying feminine power of mytho-historical figures like Cleopatra and Lady Macbeth. This transtemporal and cross-cultural feminine model of grace and strength was then tempered by the war-wearied Blunt and Robinson, both of whom instilled in Vivien a proto-Jungian notion of feminine consciousness defined by an overwhelming potential to guide humanity towards a higher state of personal and social spiritual harmony.

Chapter 4: Vivien's Magical Ascendency

I. Dion Fortune's Vivien Unveiled

In the aftermath of the First World War, Vivien's presence in new Anglo-American Arthurian literature and art began to decline alongside Tennyson's literary and cultural influence. Yet, while artistic renderings of Vivien all but ceased, she was not entirely dismissed from the post-war literary imagination. F. Scott Fitzgerald's 1922 short story, "O Russet Witch!", offers a counterpoint to the traditional story of Merlin and Vivien, wherein a modern bookseller named Merlin Grainger is beguiled over the years by the wild and beautiful socialite Alicia Dare. Though Merlin lives a normal married life, he considers if he might have been happier trying to win the vivacious Alicia's hand rather than settling for a mundane existence. In Mildred Weinberger's revisionist poetic drama *Elaine* from 1923, Vivienne lusts after Lancelot and casts a sleeping spell on the knight after her rejects her advances. Two short poems from the second half of the 1920s, Thomas de Beverley's *Story of Nimue* (1926) and Ralph de Tunstall Sneyd's *Vivian and Merlin* (1929), employ recognisable Tennysonian imagery and follow the traditional narrative scheme of Merlin's entrapment, but neither appears to have reached a wide audience.

Despite a decreasing twentieth-century interest in Vivien and her story, a distinctive taste for the Arthurian legend persisted in Britain and America after the Great War. In particular, many Modernist writers gravitated towards the myth of the Grail. Among the war's many casualties, the utter carnage and brutality of modern warfare obliterated much of the Western world's spiritual vitality, which had already been on unsteady ground since at least the nineteenth century, as Tennyson's metaphorical battle between the Christ-like Arthur and the devilish Vivien can attest. The Grail therefore became a Modernist symbol of something lost that might yet be found again upon self-reflection. While T. S. Eliot's seminal

poem *The Waste Land* (1922) is perhaps the most famous example, writers including W. B. Yeats, F. Scott Fitzgerald, James Joyce, Mary Butts, William Faulkner, Charles Williams, John Cowper Powys, and David Jones all embarked on literary grail quests in search of answers to the spiritual desolation that enveloped the 1920s and 1930s.[407] The Modernist emphasis on subjective experience resulted in the Grail's transformation into a multivalent symbol of both personal and worldly spiritual redemption during the interwar period. Influenced by the comparative anthropological studies of James Frazer's *Golden Bough* (1890) and Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* (1920), some Modernists identified the Grail as a symbol of woman and revitalising potential of the universal feminine spirit. In a sense foreshadowing Vivien's mystical literary rebirth towards the middle of the twentieth century, Sherlyn Abdoo suggests that woman is the Grail in Eliot's *Waste Land*, while Powys, in the 1955 introduction to his *Glastonbury Romance* (1932), writes that the Grail is the "heroine" of the novel.[408] Though she remained largely absent from literature in the two decades following the First World War, by the end of the 1930s, the divinely feminine principles symbolically expressed by Robinson's "torch of woman" and the Modernist Grail would once more be located in the figure of Vivien.

No one in the twentieth century put Vivien into more concrete terms of divine femininity than the occultist Violet Firth, better known as Dion Fortune. The character of Vivien le Fay Morgan, a self-proclaimed priestess of the goddess Isis, stars in Fortune's two seminal occult novels—*The Sea Priestess* from 1938 and its sequel, *Moon Magic*, written shortly after *The Sea Priestess* but published posthumously in 1956. The esoteric lifepath that

[407] For a discussion of the Modernist interest in the Grail see Matthew Sterenberg, "'The Grail is Stirring': Modernist Mysticism, the Matter of Britain, and the Quest for Spiritual Renewal" in *Mythic Thinking in Twentieth-Century Britain* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 44-70; Andrew Radford, "The Modernist Grail Quest" in *The Edinburgh Companion to Modernism, Myth and Religion*, ed. Suzanne Hobson and Andrew Radford (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023), 299-314.
[408] Sherlyn Abdoo, "Woman as Grail in T. S. Eliot's 'The Waste Land'," *Centennial Review* 28, no. 1 (Winter 1984): 48-60; John Cowper Powys, *A Glastonbury Romance* (London: Macdonald, 1955), xiii.

led Fortune to the development of Vivien le Fay Morgan is more elaborate than any other figure discussed so far in this study and must be addressed at length to adequately understand her pivotal development of the character into an avatar of a universal Goddess. One of the leading occult personalities of the interwar period of the twentieth century, she is matched only by her contemporary Aleister Crowley in terms of output of occult literature and influence on the development of modern paganism and witchcraft. Drawn to matters of mind and spirit from a young age, Fortune was educated as a psychotherapist and worked briefly as a counsellor from 1914 to 1916. She quickly became disillusioned with the therapeutic potential of psychoanalysis citing the "little success [she had] in alleviating human misery".[409] It was during her counselling years that Fortune's interest in occult studies grew, and she became acquainted with the Theosophical Society and Theodore Moriarty, an Irish occultist who became Fortune's magical mentor and instilled in her the foundations of her own magical practices, defined by her biographer, Gareth Knight, as an "interest in Atlantis, in esoteric healing, in systems of cosmology, in the techniques of trance, and the bedrock of symbolic ritual."[410] In 1919, Fortune was initiated into the occult order of the Alpha et Omega, a successor to the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (1887-1903).[411] She went on to found her own order known as the Fraternity of the Inner Light in 1922, and over the next two decades ventured to dispel the mystique surrounding occultism and make it more accessible to the inquisitive minds of the uninitiated. A prolific writer, Fortune wrote numerous book-length expositions and shorter articles on the history and theories behind modern occult practices as well as fictional novels that seek to unveil the hidden mechanisms of esoteric ritual.

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[409] Fortune quoted in *Dion Fortune and the Inner Light*, by Gareth Knight (Loughborough: Thoth Publications, 2000), 35.
[410] Knight, *Dion Fortune*, 44-45.
[411] The order of the Alpha et Omega officially dissolved in 1939 following the outbreak of the Second World War.

Fortune's personal brand of occultism, of which the mythical character of Vivien became a principal vehicle of transmission, is underscored by her own intricate spiritual development. In adolescence, she adopted her mother's faith in Christian Science and the belief in a purely spiritual reality juxtaposed against an illusory material world. Following her introduction to the Theosophical Society in 1914, she became a devout Christian mystic and took "the Master Jesus" as her spiritual guide following his appearance in a dream, an experience which proved to be a significant aspect of her initiation into the Mysteries.[412] Ronald Hutton observes that while Fortune remained devoutly Christian until around 1930, she was exceptionally unorthodox in her beliefs: she did not "have a good word to say for clergymen, always portraying them as sanctimonious fools. She never expressed any allegiance to any formal church, and she found serious fault with modern Christianity, for its loss of mystical content, while rejecting traditional doctrines such as heaven and hell."[413] Fortune's Christian alignment began to shift in the 1930s, with Hutton identifying three figures that can be considered responsible for her gradual adoption of paganistic beliefs. The first is D. H. Lawrence and his novel, *The Rainbow* (1915), which resonated with Fortune as the story of a woman searching for spiritual fulfilment beyond the restrictions of established religion and instilled in her a firm belief in an essential "sexual magnetism between woman and man". The second figure was Fortune's husband, Thomas Penry Evans, whose lectures to the members of the Inner Light expounded on the fundamental overlap of Christian and pagan belief systems, and who impressed upon Fortune a deep, if fleeting, admiration for the god Pan, who she took to be an emanation of the All-Father. The final figure behind Fortune's paganistic transformation was her principal magical partner of the 1930s, Charles Seymour, who believed that modern Christianity's mystical shortcomings could be alleviated

[412] Alan Richardson, *Priestess: The Life and Magic of Dion Fortune* (Loughborough: Thoth Publications, 2007), 94-96.
[413] Ronald Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 181.

by the pagan mystery traditions. Above all, Seymour considered the most important of the ancient deities to be that of the Great Mother, the deity which Fortune devoted herself most fervently to over the final decade of her life.[414] While Fortune's devotion regularly fluctuated between deities under the influence of these three external forces, she ultimately settled upon a succinct cosmological vision which she laid bare in her novel, *The Goat-Foot God* (1936): "All the gods are one god, and all the goddesses are one goddess, and there is one initiator."[415]

Fortune's spiritual transformation and her subsequent development of Vivien in the mid-1930s cannot be adequately understood without the consideration of a further fourth figure of influence, the psychoanalyst Carl Jung. The dominant psychoanalytic influence during Fortune's years as a student and counsellor was undoubtedly Freud, yet she largely rejected his sexual theories on the grounds that they were as likely to cause psychosexual problems in patients as heal them.[416] Following her own disheartening experiences as a counsellor, Fortune ultimately decided to keep the methods and theories of psychoanalysis at arm's length from her magical practices. However, Fortune recognised in Jung something of a kindred occult spirit. As Gareth Knight observes, by the 1930s, Jung had brought "a certain respectability and credibility to the occult field" through his writings on the intimate relationships between psychology, mythology, and alchemy. Fortune quickly took to Jung and his esoteric theories on the nature of the subconscious. As she wrote in 1935,

> Dr. Jung has a great deal to say concerning the myth-making faculty of the human mind, and the occultist knows it to be true. He knows, also, however, that its implications are farther reaching than psychology has yet suspected. The mind of poet or mystic, dwelling upon the great natural forces and factors of the manifested universe, has, by the creative use of the imagination, penetrated far more deeply into their secret causes and springs of being than has the scientist . . . .[417]

[414] Hutton, *Triumph*, 183-184.
[415] Dion Fortune, *The Goat-Foot God* (York Beach: Samuel Weiser, 1980), 381.
[416] Knight, *Dion Fortune*, 31-32.
[417] Dion Fortune, *The Mystical Qabalah* (Newburyport: Red Wheel/Weiser, 2022), 90-91.

Fortune's admiration of Jung grew steadily over the following decade, and she finally perceived that the only separation between his theories and the Mystery Tradition was a matter of translation. Two years before her death, she observed:

> With Jungian psychology the ancient Mystery Tradition can join hands. They may not speak the same language, but they have the same outlook. All that is needed is a Rosetta Stone bearing parallel inscriptions in different languages, the known and the unknown, to enable translation to begin and an immense wealth of data and experience to be made available for both sides of the council table.[418]

Fortune thus perceived Jung to be the great mediator between occultists and psychologists, mysticism and rationality, and perhaps no modern mind shaped her own ways of psychospiritual thinking during her final decade than Jung's.

While there are many similarities between their occult ideologies, Fortune appears to have been most sympathetic towards Jung's theory of the racial subconscious. One of Jung's most revolutionary contributions to the psychoanalytic field in the first half of the twentieth century was his theory that all of humanity shares in a psychic reservoir of primordial instincts and images, otherwise known respectively as the "collective unconscious" and the "archetypes". While Jung considers the collective unconscious and the archetypes to have qualities of universality, he also suggests that an individual's experience with and understanding of psychic archetypes (e.g. the *child*, the *hero*, the *mother*), are most heavily influenced by their racial identity. It is necessary to point out that Jung's conception of "race" in this instance constitutes a broader consideration of many identity factors including but not limited to an individual's ethnographic, geographic, and religio-mythographic background; while discussions of physical racial attributes can occasionally be observed in Jung's writing, these factors are for him virtually negligible when considering the transcendent psychological nature of the collective unconscious and the archetypes therein.[419] Fortune's understanding of

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[418] Fortune quoted in Knight, *Dion Fortune*, 291.
[419] Knight, *Dion Fortune*, 217; See *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, ed. Gerhard Adler and R. F. C. Hull, trans. R. F. C. Hull, vol. 7 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 152n8. Jung suggests that since "the beginning of racial differentiation essential differences [continue to be] developed in the collective psyche. . . .

race mirrors Jung's, though she is wont to use language that in the present era may appear to be more insensitive. Expounding on Eastern and Western spiritual traditions, Fortune writes that "it is very seldom that a European, living in Europe, is successfully trained by Eastern methods", and it is for this reason that she "would recommend to the white races the traditional Western system, which is admirably adapted to their psychic constitution."[420] Gordan Djurdjevic, who identifies Fortune as the Śakti of her age, observes that while Fortune's writings can come across as problematic in the present era, "her arguments do not privilege any particular race or creed over another."[421] Fortune's racial distinctions, much like Jung's, therefore serve to delineate respective traditions of initiation rather than denigrate them, and as such, she seeks to guide the would-be initiate towards the most effective psychospiritual pathway which she believes corresponds with their racial identity. Hardly one to cheaply criticise traditions outside her own, Fortune went so far as to "endorse" the legacy of Eastern gurus as experienced spiritual guides.[422] The principal matter of race in Fortune's occultism can therefore be considered as an insistence upon a better quality of spiritual knowledge transmission that an initiate can receive through engaging primarily with their own racial traditions. At the same time, as Fortune suggests, though rare, it is not impossible for Eastern methods to play a role in the initiation of a Western mind.

As with Jung, Fortune's belief in the efficacy of local racial traditions of initiation did not prevent her from frequently appropriating the Mystery teachings and frameworks of racial traditions outside her own. The most explicit example of this tendency, and also the next step on Fortune's magical path towards Vivien, is her *Mystical Qabalah* (1935).[423] At

For this reason we cannot transplant the spirit of a foreign race *in globo* into our own mentality without sensible injury to the latter".

[420] Dion Fortune, *Sane Occultism* (New York: Weiser, 1977), 161; Fortune, *Qabalah*, 7.

[421] Gordan Djurdjevic, *India and the Occult: The Influence of South Asian Spirituality on Modern Western Occultism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 88; In Hinduism, Śakti is the divine embodiment of feminine energy and the consort of Śiva, the divine embodiment of masculine energy.

[422] Fortune, *Qabalah*, 7.

[423] I retain Fortune's spellings and general interpretations of the terms and concepts relating to the Qabalah, though these can vary greatly from one tradition to another.

the same time Fortune was entertaining Jungian psychology and the pagan mystery traditions in her own occult practices, she became a student of the Jewish mystical tradition of Kabbalah—a broad set of sacred Jewish texts expounding on the relationship between the infinite and unchanging God and the finite universe. Beginning in the European Renaissance, Kabbalistic texts were transmitted to the Western world via Christian theologians under the guidance of Jewish scholars. The mystical knowledge contained in these texts was reproduced, though often from a distorted Christian perspective, in esoteric writings by authors such as Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494), Johannes Reuchlin (1455-1522), and Cornelius Agrippa (1486-1535), among others.[424] Fortune herself was introduced to Kabbalistic teachings through the works of Golden Dawn members Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers and Aleister Crowley, with Mathers's *The Kabbalah Unveiled* (1887) having a particularly significant impact on the didactic approach of Fortune's own *Qabalah*.[425] While Fortune's *Qabalah* is like Mathers's a largely Western appropriation of original Kabbalistic tradition—applying to her expositions of Kabbalistic concepts such European traditions as the Tarot—it has nonetheless made a lasting impression on the development of modern magical practices and serves as a valuable introduction to Jewish mystical thought.

Fortune considered her *Qabalah* to be inseparable from the novels that were written in its wake, and she believed that a simultaneous study of her texts was the most effective method of comprehending her occult system. As she wrote in the preface to *The Sea Priestess*:

> The 'Mystical Qabalah' gives the theory, but the novels give the practice. Those who read the novels without having studied the 'Qabalah' will get hints and a stimulus to their subconscious. Those who study the ['Qabalah'] without reading the novels will get an interesting jig-saw puzzle to play with; but those who study the 'Mystical

[424] Judika Illes, Foreword to *The Mystical Qabalah*, by Dion Fortune, xi.
[425] Fortune, *Qabalah*, xiii.

> Qabalah' with the help of the novels will get the keys of the Temple put into their hands.[426]

At the heart of *The Mystical Qabalah* is the *OTZ CHIIM*, or the Jewish Tree of Life, and it is upon this Tree that all of Fortune's magical work (practical and literary) from the mid-1930s onward is grounded. The Tree consists of ten Sephiroth and twenty-two paths connecting individual Sephirah to one another (fig. 18). Each Sephirah represents for Fortune a distinct state of consciousness within a hierarchy, with Kether representing the highest state of consciousness from which the rest of the Sephiroth emanate and Malkuth representing the physical plane, or the lowest state of consciousness. The twenty-two paths connecting the Sephiroth are those "by which the soul unfolds its realisation of the cosmos"—they are the routes initiates and magical adepts must travel along to reach successive levels of consciousness.[427]

For the purposes of this study, it is enough to understand the foundational trinity of the Tree, for the nature of Fortune's Vivien ultimately resides therein. Fortune refers to the supreme trinity as the Supernal Triangle, and it consists of the Sephiroth Kether, Chokmah, and Binah. Kether represents the universal initiator, which Fortune describes as "the primal crystallisation into manifestation of that which was hitherto unmanifest and therefore unknowable by us. Concerning the root from which Kether springs we can know nothing; but concerning Kether itself we can know something." Kether has no formal qualities and can only be understood as "pure being".[428] The primal energy that is said to flow forth from Kether, a concept vaguely conceived at best, is represented by the first emanation and the second Sephirah known as Chokmah. Fortune puts the relationship between Kether and Chokmah into terms of a straight line, with Chokmah representing the "primary dynamism"

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[426] Dion Fortune, *The Sea Priestess* (York Beach: Red Wheel/Weiser, 2003), xiii; hereafter cited as *SP*.
[427] Fortune, *Qabalah*, 33.
[428] Ibid., 102-103.

of the universe understood as "unorganised, uncompensated force".[429] This force is received and organised in Binah, the Third Sephirah. It is from Binah that everything in the universe which can be perceived as having form emanates. Fortune describes Chokmah and Binah as "the primordial Maleness and Femaleness" and suggests that neither can be conceived of without the existence of the other. She further writes that "the dynamic male type of force is the stimulator of upbuilding and evolution" while "the female type of force is the builder of forms".[430] Stemming from this sexual duality, the essential relationship between Chokmah and Binah is for Fortune one of polarity, with Chokmah acting as the positive generator of force and Binah acting as the negative receiver of that force. This primordial sexual polarity provides the foundation of Fortune's universal cosmology, and it serves as the basis of her generalised belief that the most potent magical work is done by partners of the opposite sex.

While Fortune fervently abided by the many principles contained within the *OTZ CHIIM*, towards the end of the 1930s she devoted herself most enthusiastically to the concept of Binah. Identified by Fortune as the Great Goddess, the dark sterile Mother, the bright fertile Mother, and Marah, the Great Sea, Binah's dualistic essence represents in many ways for Fortune the most fundamental and lucid conception of the ebb and flow of universal energies.[431] As she writes:

> Whatsoever provides a form to serve life as a vehicle is of Her. It must be remembered, however, that life confined in a form, although it is enabled thereby to organise and evolve, is much less free than it was when it was unlimited (though also unorganised) on its own plane. Involvement in a form is therefore the beginning of the death of life. It is a straitening and a limiting; a binding and a constricting. Form checks life, thwarts it, and yet enables it to organise.[432]

As the essence of both life and death, for Fortune, Binah represents the one Goddess from which all goddesses from all the world's cultures emanate. Her many traditional guises

[429] Ibid., 114-115.
[430] Ibid., 115.
[431] Ibid., 128.
[432] Ibid., 131.

include such divinities as the Babylonian Tiamat, the Hindu Śakti, Demeter and Persephone (Kore) of the Eleusinian Mysteries, and even the Virgin Mary. Fortune herself worshipped Binah through the figure of the Egyptian Isis, whose aspect is said to manifest on different planes of consciousness (the Sephiroth) as either Veiled or Unveiled, Earthly or Heavenly, Dark or Bright, Black or White. The supreme circular dualism of Isis came to pervade Fortune's psyche so powerfully that references to the male deities she once revered are almost entirely absent from her later literary works. And as Hutton observes, in Fortune's final novel *Moon Magic*, she effectively develops Isis "as the only deity".[433]

The many cross-cultural veins of the Mystery tradition that interweave through Fortune's occultism ultimately converge in the Arthurian legend, which acted as the principal site of Fortune's magical practices between the late 1930s and early 1940s. As a Welsh native and staunch British loyalist, and considering her Jungian racial beliefs regarding the Mysteries, the Arthurian legend naturally became for Fortune the clearest and most dynamic expression of her cosmological vision. Furthermore, key aspects of her earthly existence had been expressed in terms of the legend from her earliest magical days. From 1922 until her death, Fortune kept a private residence at Chalice Orchard in Glastonbury where she conducted rituals and contacted the ancient druidical spirits of the Tor, which she believed was the magical gateway to the higher plane of Avalon. In 1934, she wrote a short book entitled *Glastonbury: Avalon of the Heart* as a tribute to the site's magical legacy. Fortune often identified the spiritual successors of the Arthurian legend on the physical plane, as she casually referred to her magician husband as "Merl", while she came to identify herself, especially through *The Sea Priestess* and *Moon Magic*, as a veritable yet more amicable reincarnation of Morgan le Fay; perhaps her most important magical invocation of the legend, Fortune attempted to rouse the spirit of Arthur at the outbreak of the Second World

[433] Hutton, *Triumph*, 186.

War to once more guard Britain's shores and lead the nation out of darkness back into light.[434] Many aspects of the Arthurian legend were therefore more than mere fables for Fortune, and she found that engaging with the spirits of the legend on the astral plane could produce tangible results in the physical world.

Fortune considered the Arthurian legend to be, at its core, a "formula" of the Mystery tradition espoused by the Qabalah. And as with many formulaic interpretations of the Mystery tradition, she believed that the stories, themes, characters, and symbols of the Arthurian legend could be understood on increasingly deeper psychospiritual levels by way of the *OTZ CHIIM*.[435] Fortune's Qabalistic Arthurian formula is richly detailed, drawn from a wide variety of sources—though it tends to emphasise Malory—, and covers many of the hallmarks of the legend such as the Grail quest, the life of Merlin, and the complex trinity of Arthur, Lancelot, and Guinevere. A partial rendering of the scheme, which Fortune recorded by way of trance mediumship in the early 1940s, is presented in the first part of the collected volume *The Arthurian Formula* (2006) and is further developed at length by Gareth Knight in *The Secret Tradition of the Arthurian Legend* (1983). For the purposes of this study, I focus primarily on Fortune's interwoven considerations of Vivien and Morgan le Fay.

Fortune's devotion to Isis naturally positioned Vivien and Morgan le Fay as two of the most important aspects of her Arthurian formula. Both women occupy the second of three successive "grades" of Arthurian consciousness, which Knight succinctly classifies as "the Grade of Merlin and the Faery Women".[436] In the context of this study, this grade can generally be considered as the grade of initiation into the higher sexual relationships between

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[434] Knight, *Dion Fortune*, 72-76; Richardson, *Priestess*, 302.

[435] Dion Fortune, "The Arthurian Formula - Part One" in *The Arthurian Formula*, by Dion Fortune and Margaret Lumley Brown, ed. Gareth Knight (Loughborough, Leicestershire: Thoth Publications, 2006), 34.

[436] In *The Secret Tradition in Arthurian Legend* (Cheltenham: Skylight Press, 2012), Knight classifies the first and third grades respectively as "the Grade of Arthur and the Round Table Fellowship" and "the Grade of Guenevere and the Forces of Love". He labels an unofficial fourth grade of the Arthurian legend as "the Greater Mysteries and the Holy Grail".

man and woman, or sexual polarity. Fortune identifies Vivien and Morgan as the two principal faeries of the Arthurian legend that respectively "represent the Kether and Malkuth of magic", with Vivien representing "the vehicle of the heavenly Isis" on the inner planes and Morgan embodying "the priestess of the earthly Isis" on the material plane.[437] Both women are responsible for the sexual initiation of Arthur, though both have different goals relating to the magical roles they each play. Beginning with Vivien, who Fortune conflates with the Lady of the Lake, she is tasked with undertaking the first phase of the young Arthur's initiation into the higher order of sex relations. This initial step is represented by Vivien's bestowal of Excalibur and the scabbard on Arthur. The phallic symbol of the sword represents Arthur's innate masculine virility, while the feminine symbol of the scabbard suggests his transformation from an unrestrained "virile animal" into a "gentle knight", which Fortune describes as "a strong man controlling strength."[438] In this transitional moment, the polar forces of masculinity and femininity—respectively symbolised by the sword and the scabbard—become aroused in Arthur and achieve a kind of equilibrated state, essentially a higher state of consciousness. Following Arthur's successful astral "mating" with the Goddess-ensouled faery Vivien, and with his "higher centres" awakened, he is prepared to engage in a fruitful sexual relationship on the material plane.[439]

While Arthur's initiation on the astral plane proves successful, his sexual exploits on the material plane infamously result in personal and kingdom-wide catastrophe. In Fortune's formula, Morgan is conflated with Morgause as the incestuous lover of Arthur and the mother of his child, the patricidal Mordred. As a priestess of the earthly Isis, it is Morgan's duty to further stimulate Arthur's higher centres awakened by Vivien, thereby arousing her own. Yet as Fortune explains, Morgan, desiring to raise herself to a higher magical grade behind

[437] Fortune, "Arthurian Formula," 51.
[438] Ibid., 49.
[439] Ibid., 50.

Merlin's back, "seduced Arthur because of his higher magnetism, which was of a cosmic order, . . . so that he could arouse the corresponding level in her." Morgan's plot necessarily fails because, as Fortune suggests, she and Arthur, "being of like blood, were of a similar potency, and therefore did not equilibrate each other". As a result, Morgan reinforces Arthur's baser "Elemental" nature, the spawn of which is Mordred—a child of unbalance who eventually destroys Arthur both on the material plane by way of physical death and on the inner planes represented by the downfall of the Round Table following its failure to maintain the equilibrating principles contained within the chivalric code.[440]

Despite appearing as oppositional embodiments of good and evil in Fortune's formula, neither Vivien's nor Morgan's character exists as a singular force with a singular motive. Fortune notes that Vivien's seduction of Merlin is essentially identical to Morgan's seduction of Arthur. As such, Vivien becomes, if only momentarily, an evil seductress because she is, like Morgan is to Arthur, of an unequal magical grade with Merlin. And where Fortune finds Vivien to be a force of both creation and destruction, Knight likewise determines that "in the end Morgan the mischief-maker becomes Morgan the healer" as she takes her place on Arthur's barge as one of Vivien's priestesses of Avalon.[441] Fortune therefore understands Vivien and Morgan (along with every character in the Arthurian legend) to possess two-sided natures, capable of invoking both the heavenly and earthly Isis while ultimately existing as two fundamentally inextricable emanations of the one Goddess.[442] It is from this Arthurian Goddess-matrix that Fortune's Vivien le Fay Morgan emanates.

Before engaging directly with Fortune's Vivien, one final piece of the contextual frame must be accounted for—the magical authorship of both *The Sea Priestess* and *Moon*

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[440] Ibid., 50-51.
[441] Knight, *Secret Tradition*, 157.
[442] Fortune, "Arthurian Formula," 45.

Magic. Fortune does not claim sole authorship of either novel and asserts that she acted largely as a storytelling channel for the vital spirit-personality of Vivien herself. As Fortune recounts: "when I imagined the character of Vivien Le Fay Morgan, or Lilith Le Fay, as she variously called herself, I brought into being a personality, and in the second book in which she figures—[*Moon Magic*]—she is very far from being a puppet in my hands, but takes charge of the situation."[443] Following six false starts on *Moon Magic* and with no notion of the novel's plot, Fortune finally resolved to tell the story in the first person as dictated by Vivien herself. As a result, Fortune declares to have only "carried out the intentions of the principal character" and "[accepts] no responsibility for either the plot or the characters—[as] they created themselves." Anticipating the criticisms of her more sceptical readers, Fortune momentarily acknowledges that "[Vivien] may, of course, represent my Freudian subconscious" and even admits that there is "a great deal of me in [Vivien] Le Fay". However, as a final impetus of authorial departure, she ultimately proclaims that there is "a great deal more that is not me."[444] To add more intrigue to the supernatural authorship of Vivien's story, sometime after the publication of *Moon Magic* in 1956, Vivien's restless spirit-personality contacted Margaret Lumley Brown (1886-1975)—Fortune's successor as the leader of the Society of the Inner Light. Brown recorded her channelings as *The Death of Vivien Le Fay Morgan,* a short story first published in 1973 that records Vivien's final days on the material plane and her search for a magical successor.[445]

As hinted at by the magical authority of Vivien's story, and as Fortune herself plainly suggests in the introductions to both novels, *The Sea Priestess* and *Moon Magic* are not ordinary works of escapist fiction. They comprise, in fact, a comprehensive and coordinated

[443] Dion Fortune, *Moon Magic* (York Beach: Red Wheel/Weiser, 2003), xvii; hereafter cited as *MM*.
[444] Ibid., xvii-xviii.
[445] Margaret Lumley Brown, *The Death of Vivien Le Fay Morgan* in *Aspects of Occultism*, by Dion Fortune (York Beach: Samuel Weiser, 2000), 78-87.

literature of practical magical initiation.[446] Contained with the narratives of both novels is Fortune's own Rite of Isis. As Knight describes it:

> The purpose of the Rite is for the priestess to awaken her male partner to his full potential by mediating a goddess to him. At the end of this experience, he should have achieved greater psychic and spiritual wholeness, having met and realised the deeper and subtler powers of the feminine. In esoteric terms, he has become an initiate of the goddess, while she, as the adept in pursuit of her own magical destiny, passes on, uncommitted, to her next assignment from the inner beings for whom she works—represented in the [novels] by the shadowy figure known as the Priest of the Moon.[447]

To be certain, the Rite of Isis as it is presented in Fortune's novels is not meant to serve as the reader's literal initiation, but rather works to stimulate the reader's imagination and awaken the reader's higher consciousness to the potentialities of magical practice. Fortune adds that "if readers in their reading will identify themselves with one or other of the characters according to taste, they will be led to a curious psychological experience – the experience of the therapeutic use of phantasy, an unappreciated aspect of psychotherapy."[448] Emulating the Priest of the Moon's role in the novels as Vivien's inner-plane magical instructor, Vivien herself takes on the role of the reader's literary magical instructor and guides the reader, as she respectively guides her co-protagonists Wilfrid and Rupert in *The Sea Priestess* and *Moon Magic*, on the path of initiation. While the novels serve only as an introduction to magical initiation, more receptive readers, Fortune suggests, may find themselves in Vivien's presence beyond her fictional confines: "[Vivien] considers herself a priestess of the great goddess Nature [the heavenly Isis], and as such can claim divine right in the face of all man-made laws. . . . She lives for others as well as for me; and it may well be that to some of those who read these pages she will come as a shadowy figure half-seen in the twilight of the mind."[449]

[446] For a detailed study on the initiatory aspects of Fortune's novels see Georgia van Raalte, "Literary Initiation in the Occult Novels of Dion Fortune" (PhD diss., University of Surrey, 2022).
[447] Knight, Foreword to *SP*, ix.
[448] *SP*, xvii.
[449] *MM*, xviii.

The Sea Priestess is told from the perspective of Wilfred Maxwell, a sexually-repressed middle-class real estate agent who lives with his ailing mother and irritable sister in the fictional town of Dickford, England. Due to the stress of his homelife, Wilfred develops asthma and is forced into seclusion for many months while he recovers. During his recuperation, he takes an interest in theosophical literature and the idea of reincarnation, while also spending ample time meditating on the moon, the sea, and the hidden aspects of nature. He also experiences vivid, drug-induced visions of reality, including a recuring vision of an ancient and beautiful sea priestess. As he regains his vitality, Wilfred meets Miss Vivien le Fay Morgan, a mysterious and seemingly ageless upper-class woman whose estates the Maxwell family has presided over for many years. Vivien, who calls herself Morgan and possesses the face of the priestess from Wilfred's visions, employs him to find her a new residence, and together they discover a deserted war fort overlooking the sea. A gifted artist, Wilfred agrees to decorate Vivien's new Sea Temple, and over the next few months she divulges her identity as a priestess of Isis, introduces him to her astral guide, the Priest of the Moon, and reveals that she had a relationship with him in a past life—she a priestess of Atlantis, and he one of her sacrifices to the sea. Vivien and Wilfred begin to practice magic together with the aim of carrying on the cosmic healing efforts of their past lives. As the two become more magically intimate, Wilfred falls in love with Vivien, though he comes to realise, in part by Vivien's plain refusal, that engaging in a sexual relationship with her would hamper the efficacy of their work. Following the completion of their work, Vivien disappears with little trace, and Wilfred descends into overwhelming depression. He soon enters into a relationship with his office clerk, Molly, who has long been infatuated with him, and the two eventually marry. Encouraged by Vivien in a letter left for Molly, the newlywed couple begin their own magical work and Molly is soon able to call forth the Priest of the Moon just as Vivien had done. Thus initiated as a priestess of Isis, Molly completes Wilfred's own

initiation through the physical consummation of their love, leaving him with a final radiant vision of the vast cosmos and the Goddess unveiled.

Moon Magic is in essence a sequel to *The Sea Priestess* and tells a similar story of magical initiation and the quest for equilibrated sexual polarity. The novel is divided into three parts, with the first being told from the perspective of Rupert Malcolm, a distinguished London doctor who projects a general unpleasantness stemming from an emotionally and sexually frustrating marriage to a manipulative invalid. One day while walking beside the Thames, Rupert has a run in with a mysterious cloaked woman who immediately brings to mind the shadowy woman who has haunted his dreams since childhood. Rupert increasingly fixates on the woman as his psychological state declines and the image of her becomes an emotional anchor. On the verge of a nervous breakdown, he is one evening surprised by the woman's sudden appearance in his office. The woman, soon revealed to be Vivien, explains to Rupert that she has felt his psychic projections towards her and offers to soothe his mind through the practice of magic. The second part of the novel is told from the perspective of Vivien, who now goes by the name Lilith, and is largely set in her home, a repurposed church that also serves as her new temple. Though plagued by his convalescent wife's needs and his own puritanical morality, Rupert agrees to become Vivien's magical partner, and over time, he comes to unreservedly identify her as a priestess of Isis and even a manifestation of the Goddess herself. As the potency of their magical work increases, Rupert finds himself, like Wilfred, falling in love with Vivien, and he becomes ever more frustrated by her refusal to enter into a physical sexual relationship with him. She reiterates that sex will not fulfil him and will only hinder the success of their magical work on a cosmic scale. In the final part of the novel, which was channelled and written out by Fortune's associate Anne Fox following the former's death, Rupert's physical discontent is at last psychically relieved when the pair engage in the Rite of Isis. Similar to Wilfred and Molly's consummation in *The Sea*

Priestess, Vivien's beauty inspires in Rupert a vision of the divine, and in a moment like lightning, his inhibitions and the psychic boundaries between the two dissolve and they at last become one.

While Fortune's Vivien is the most dynamic interpretation of the character in this study, she employs many of the symbolically-charged aesthetic traits of her predecessors. When Wilfred first makes Vivien's acquaintance, he describes her in the darkly tantalising terms of a modernised femme fatale: "She was tall and slight, and she had got a black velvet tam o'shanter on her head with a diamond clip in it, and a black fur coat with enormous collar and cuffs. . . . I could not see her face because her tam was pulled down over the ear that was towards me and her huge collar was up, but I could tell by the way she moved that she was a beautiful woman."[450] When at last Vivien removes her heavy coat, Wilfred perceives an almost prototypical Gothic vampire: "She was a dark woman, brown-eyed, black-browed, slightly aquiline, and her skin was a very pale olive, more creamy than olive, in fact. Her eyes were not darkened with mascara - they did not need it - but her lips were pillar-box scarlet. She had long slender white hands, too, and the nails were filed to a point and looked as if they had been dipped in blood."[451] Vivien's seemingly ageless complexion enhances the effect of her vampiric aesthetic, while Wilfred further identifies the startling trait of timelessness in her lamp-like eyes, which he notes "were not the eyes of a girl. There were no pouches around them, the skin was quite taut, like a young woman's, but the eyes themselves had the peculiar expression of quiet watchfulness that goes with experience."[452] The vampiric portrait comes full circle in *Moon Magic*, with Vivien describing herself in terms almost superhuman; at some point losing track of her own age, she surmises that she is around one-hundred and twenty years old and possesses a "strange inner vitality" that is "ageless and

[450] *SP*, 25.
[451] Ibid., 28.
[452] Ibid., 28.

deathless and timeless. . . . neither young nor old; neither [that of] a young girl nor a mature woman."[453]

In both novels, Vivien gradually sheds her Modern-Gothic vampiric visage for one that, while certainly more colourful, was no less threatening in many late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Western minds—that of the tantalisingly sensual Oriental woman. The first of Vivien's aesthetic transformations occurs in the wake of one of Wilfred's asthma attacks. As Wilfred recovers under Vivien's watchful eye, he one evening muses on the ethereal atmosphere of the newly remodelled sea temple and its priestess:

> All the room was of a translucent, shimmering greyish-green, like seawater in sunlight; even the dress [Vivien] was wearing was sea-green, and round her neck was a string of star sapphires that caught the light strangely. It was a queer dress, medieval, of shining satin, no trimmings, and moulded close to her figure . . . . She had not got her scarlet whore's claws . . . but instead her nails were lacquered a pearly-white, iridescent, the effect very queer and inhuman.[454]

Vivien's change of dress evokes all the green-robed Viviens that precede her and, in a sense, alludes to the broader moral spectrum on which each of the characters thus far discussed in this study fall—from Tennyson's devious Vivien dressed in her promiscuously thin palm-coloured sheath to Robinson's seraphic Vivian verdantly vested like one of Broceliande's slender cedars. Her "scarlet whore's claws", emblematic of both the Whore of Revelation and Vivien's largely deprecative moral valuation imposed upon her since Tennyson, are replaced by pearl-hued nails which subtly imply the mythical seaside birth of Aphrodite/Venus—another aspect of the heavenly Isis—whose tears of joy are said to have turned to pearls. Through this simple change of outfit, Vivien simultaneously pays homage to her traditional Western—particularly British—heritage while also begins to reveal her esoteric Eastern origins.

[453] *MM*, 39, 45.
[454] *SP*, 67-68.

Vivien's Orientalist inheritances are more plainly expressed in *Moon Magic*. In her own words:

> My face was pure Egyptian, slightly high in the cheekbones, which makes my eyes look almond-shaped; slightly aquiline as to the nose, for there was Assyrian blood in the royal caste of Egypt. My eyes are very deep-set, which makes them look darker than they really are. Seen in a good light, they are almost green—to match my tiger teeth . . . . I am supposed to be like Cleopatra—or perhaps Cleopatra was like me. I have an immense amount of hair of that very dark brown that is just not quite black . . . . Always I wear it parted in two smooth crow-wings upon my forehead as the Indian women wear theirs. For this reason people have talked of coloured blood, though my skin should give the lie to that, for it is the white of ivory, or of the great magnolia blooms that have no touch of pink in them.[455]

Hardly evocative of the many lily-pale, golden-haired damsels that populate Arthurian legend, Vivien's rich description of her dark physical features expresses a generalised Orientalist vision of the dangerously sensual Eastern woman: a figure defined by liquidly curvaceous lines, with a dusky yet invitingly warm air to match a darkly warm complexion; all this physicality coalesces in an alluring feline beauty, desirable in its beguiling wildness. This heavily idealised vision is immediately heightened, and even superseded, by Vivien's self-comparison to Cleopatra, the result of which is an acknowledgement of a refined, quasi-deific womanhood, supremely seductive—both physically and psychically—and characterised by an unearthly, potentially fatal, God (or Goddess)-granted feminine omnipotence.

It is worth recalling here Howard Pyle's images of the uraeus-crowned Vivien. As noted in the previous chapter, the coiled serpent crown that Pyle's Vivien wears frequently adorns depictions of Cleopatra in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Western art. Of further significance, the uraeus, an emblem primarily associated with the Lower Egyptian goddess Wadjet, can often be found crowning Isis—who later became associated with Wadjet following the unification of Lower and Upper Egypt—in ancient hieroglyphics. Therefore, it

[455] *MM*, 48.

would seem that Cleopatra, historically a bridge between Rome (the West) and Egypt (the East), operates as a similar intermediary between the imaginatively-realised "Western" Vivien and "Eastern" Isis. And as the different styles of Fortune, Pyle, and the hieroglyphics suggest, there exists in the Isis-Cleopatra-Vivien trinity subtle yet innate qualities of implicitness and indivisibility that allow this trinity to call across artistic genre, medium, and era.

Returning briefly to Vivien's self-appraisal, her crow-winged hairstyle brings her into symbolic contact with Indian women and suggests a tangential association with the Hindu goddess Śakti. Her skin's ivory complexion, which appears ironically at odds with her claim to Assyrian lineage, brings her back into a white Western racial sphere, though again, her idealised paleness suggests an aspect of inhumanity that scrutinises the extent of her Western identity as much as it rejects her Eastern identity. In this sense, Vivien's physicality simultaneously encompasses a multitude of Western and Eastern racial identities and traditions, yet it altogether places her beyond the very concept of racial distinction.

Vivien's (un)worldly complexity is accentuated still further by her tastes in fashion. She sports a diverse range of imported gemstones, "jade, amber, coral, lapis, malachite for day; and for night . . . square-cut emeralds; long pale drop-shaped pearls; and all the fires of the different opals".[456] As a guilty pleasure, she dresses in the furs of fox and wolf, jungle and Himalayan leopard, for, invoking her more serpentine sisters before her, she teasingly identifies as "a cold-blooded creature".[457] This decadent selection of furs especially evokes Fortescue-Brickdale's painting of Tennyson's Vivien lavishly draped in the exotic pelt of a Bengal tiger—an image of natural beauty, untamed power, and deadly prowess (fig. 16). Vivien's choice of jewellery comprises long earrings, oversized finger rings, and "bracelets

[456] Ibid., 48.
[457] Ibid., 49.

like fetters" on slender wrists, the later of these attributes once again recalling Pyle's voguish artistic depictions of Nymue and Vivien (figs. 13 and 14). The persona of the prowling femme fatale is enhanced by a final description of her nails which she keeps "long to match my tiger teeth" and moreover by her choice of shoes which are always "soft and light and supple . . . so that I can move in them without sound."[458] Especially attuned to human sensuality, Vivien "[uses] colour and movement and sound and light as other women use fashions," yet above all she values scent, citing its many psychological and theological applications. Of all the aromatic profiles she is partial to the "spicy and aromatic" earthen scents of sandal, cedar, Russian leather, camphor, galbanum, and frankincense, and admits that "the flower odours are not for me—no one has ever likened *me* to a flower though I have been told I am as beautiful as a leopard."[459] As her choice of musky scents implies, Vivien is hardly emblematic of the flowering maid of Arthurian romance and a far cry from embodying the "petulant kitten" that is Tennyson's enchantress. Rather, she has grown in Fortune's novels into the fully-grown tiger or leopard, for Fortune symbolic of the physically and psycho-spiritually matured woman—as naturally beautiful as she is inherently menacing.

Complementing her multi-racial constitution and symbolism, Fortune's Vivien is in a sense not one character but three, adopting at different times the names of the Arthurian Vivien and Morgan and the pre-biblical Lilith. Early in the *Sea Priestess*, Vivien reveals herself to be of Welsh and Breton lineage and notes that her father named her "Vivien" after "the wicked young witch who beguiled Merlin in his old age in the forest of Broceliande"; she is thus "fey by nature as well as by name."[460] Following in *Moon Magic*, Vivien admits to Rupert that her birth name "jars" her. He agrees with her judgement on the basis that it sounds "too like something out of Tennyson", to which point Vivien adds that she has

[458] Ibid., 49.
[459] Ibid., 50; emphasis in original.
[460] *SP*, 34, 37.

nothing in common with Merlin's fatal deceiver.[461] Vivien reveals to both Wilfred and Rupert that she took the surname of Morgan as a stipulation of the inheritance that she received from a woman of the same name. Like her birth name, however, Vivien feels that this name "just isn't me."[462] While she does not reveal why the name Morgan does not suit her, Fortune's own distaste for the popular Christianised depictions of Morgan le Fay as an incessantly wicked sorceress is perhaps indicative of the reason underlying Vivien's own rejection of the name. Vivien at last resolves to call herself Lilith—the polarising name her father originally intended for her that a clergyman swiftly rejected. When Rupert admits his ignorance of the mytho-historical identity behind the name, Vivien draws his attention to Lilith's more vindicated identities as the Jungian "archetypal woman of man's collective unconscious" and the Qabalistic (Edenic) Adam's source of wisdom; however, she also acknowledges—though with more than a hint of criticism—Lilith's ecclesiastically-envenomed titles of "fallen angel", "soulless spirit of earth", and "demon".[463]

Though it is more readily apparent in Vivien's description of Lilith, all three of her names express dualistic identities: "Vivien" carries the moral burden of Tennyson's evil seductress but also encapsulates for Fortune the "Kether of magic" as "the vehicle of the heavenly Isis"; "Morgan" elicits the figure of the diabolical witch-sister yet also embodies the healing spirit of Avalon's divine sorority; finally, the name "Lilith" can be summed up using Tennyson's lyrics, as it calls up archetypal images of women differing at "worst and best, as Heaven and Hell." That each of Vivien's names expresses both "dark" and "light" identities, it is clear that all three are intimately connected with Isis. Indeed, Fortune finds that the names and corresponding dual identities are all emanations of Isis that suggest "the same thing" if only "under different aspects".[464] Vivien's trinity of names does not therefore split

[461] *MM*, 105.
[462] *SP*, 34; *MM*, 105.
[463] Ibid., 105.
[464] *SP*, 127.

Vivien's identity but rather coalesces in and reinforces her inherent singularity. Reinforcing this point, Vivien ultimately proclaims to Rupert: "I have been called the Cosmic Harlot and the Ever-Virgin. Both are true of me".[465] Thus, where Wilfred first realises that Vivien exists as "not one woman, but all women", the converse is also true—she, like Isis, is all women in one woman.[466]

Further considering the principle of unity that underscores Vivien's three names, each name change she undergoes is in a sense symbolic of her own magical progression. Vivien's suppression of her Arthurian-inspired names and adoption of the archaic "Lilith" is akin to Fortune's own spiritual growth and ultimate devotion to the Egyptian Isis rather than to a prototypical Western goddess (e.g. the Virgin Mary); that is to say, Vivien's suppression of her Arthurian names is not a rejection of her localised Western racial heritage but is instead a deliberate expansion of her consciousness with the aim of participating in an older, more primal, and more universally encompassing Goddess tradition, of which the Arthurian legend is one of many functional aspects. In the more esoteric terms of magical initiation, the bestowal of an Arthurian name upon Vivien at birth acted as a preliminary initiation into the Mystery tradition by way of her own racial heritage, while the acquisition of the surname "Morgan" simply reinforced this heritage and her role as a priestess on the physical plane of Malkuth. Vivien's assumption of the name "Lilith" can then be considered as symbolic of the higher magical grade she achieves in adulthood; in this sense, "Lilith" is a name—or rank—that Vivien becomes worthy of adopting following the successful completion of the magical rites she conducts with Wilfred and Rupert.

The multivalent personality of Fortune's Vivien is overlayed by her preeminent identity as "the ageless and deathless priestess of Great Isis".[467] Yet another aspect of her

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[465] *MM*, 226.
[466] *SP*, 116.
[467] *MM*, 45-46.

dualistic disposition, Vivien's role as a priestess is expressed under two guises, first as a sea-priestess on the physical plane and then as a moon-priestess on the astral plane. Like Fortune herself, Vivien traces her divine occupation back to her former lives in the Atlantean empire and later to the Egyptian Dynasties.[468] During these past incarnations she became indoctrinated as a sea-priestess, whom she describes to Wilfred as "a kind of pythoness", or oracle, through which the gods spoke; and "being a pythoness, she was negative, passive; she did not make magic herself, but was an instrument in the hands of the priests."[469] Vivien's role as a sea-priestess is characterised by a negative and passive polarity and is representative of the generalised relationship between man and woman on the physical plane. While she is ever celibate like the Vestal Virgins of Rome, her physical relationship with man symbolically manifests through her relationship to the divine, wherein she acts as the receiver and, at the priests' discretion, the disseminator of divine mandate.

In both *The Sea Priestess* and *Moon Magic*, Vivien adopts the role of the positively-charged moon-priestess as part of her quest to equilibrate the universal masculine and feminine sexual forces. As she explains this shift in polarity to Rupert: "On the physical plane you, the male, are positive, and I, the woman, am negative, receptive; but on the inner planes, in magic, the polarity is reversed, and I am the positive and you are the negative, needing my influence to make you active and creative."[470] Vivien's primary objective as a moon-priestess and the primary creative stimulus on the inner planes is the generation of magical images, the channels through which all magic flows. Vivien explains to Wilfred that moon-magic, particularly the act of image creation, can only go so far when practiced alone and necessarily requires a partnership to be wholly successful:

> "For me to make a magical image of myself [as a priestess] is auto-suggestion," . . . "and begins and ends subjectively. But when two or three of us get to work together,

[468] Fortune believed Atlantis, like Avalon, was both a real historical place and an inexhaustible astral construct.
[469] *SP*, 108; The high priestess of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi, whose primary role was that of oracle, was known as the *Pythia*.
[470] *MM*, 198.

> and you picture me as I picture myself, then things begin to happen. Your suggestion aids my auto-suggestion, and then – then it passes outside ourselves, and things begin to build up in the astral ethers, and they are the channels of forces."[471]

The rituals Vivien performs with both Wilfred and Rupert can be considered as exercises in magical image creation. Led by Vivien's positive stimulus and initial image suggestion on the inner planes, both men come to vividly imagine scenes from Atlantean and ancient Egyptian temples, Vivien's magical instructor—the shadowy Priest of the Moon, and above all Vivien as she desires to be perceived—as a priestess. Having had their dormant feminine aspect (the *anima*) stimulated by Vivien and the image of her as a priestess, both men arrive at the ultimate image of "the eternal woman, the archetypal feminine," an image that "[does] not speak to the surface of consciousness, the sophisticated mind that the novelties catch, but to the archaic and primordial that is in the soul of every man".[472]

The overwhelming intricacy of Vivien's identity matrix revealed through Fortune's writing makes her the most difficult character to confidently grasp in this study. Ironically, she perhaps possesses the clearest objective of any of her literary and artistic sisters analysed thus far. Fortune's efforts to plainly reveal the occult path to wisdom for the general public was largely spurred on by her belief that "the psychological state of modern civilisation is on par with the sanitation of the mediaeval walled cities."[473] Like many of her interwar contemporaries, Fortune was in her own ways critical of the figures orchestrating the World Wars (though she was very much part of Britain's home front war effort) and, as noted above, she found religious leaders and the dogmatic doctrines they preached to be untrustworthy—it is no coincidence and with no small amount of historical irony that a ruined war fort and a decrepit church serve as the bones of Vivien's new pagan temples. Perhaps recognising her own mortal limitations as a priestess, Fortune called on the magical

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[471] *SP*, 109.
[472] *MM*, 49.
[473] *SP*, xvii.

spirit of Vivien to not only aid in cleansing the collective mind of modern civilisation of hatred and hypocrisy, but to also "bring back into modern life something that has been lost and forgotten and that is badly needed"—that is "'the knowledge of the subtle, magnetic relationship between a man and a woman, and the fact that it is part of a larger whole.'"[474] It is only through this knowledge that Fortune believed humanity would ascend to the imminent Age of Aquarius, or the Golden Age of Humanity that Crowley dubbed the Aeon of Horus and John Cowper Powys identified as the Age of Saturn. The signs of this coming Golden Age would not be found, Vivien reveals, "in any physical or instinctual anomaly, but in temperament"—that is, in the reconciliation of the primordial masculine and feminine forces that reside in every human soul.[475] Comparable to Edwin Arlington Robinson, Fortune believed that Vivien carried within her being, imagined or otherwise, a symbolic flame of universal womanhood that would guide humanity from the darkness of a war-torn and aggressively masculine material age into a supremely magical era of feminine enlightenment and a resultant universal sexual equilibrium.

II. John Cowper Powys's Nineue and the Golden Age of Saturn

While Dion Fortune's development of Vivien through the dual lenses of magic and contemporary psychology was certainly idiosyncratic, it was not entirely abnormal near the middle of the twentieth century. John Cowper Powys, a highly enigmatic figure and self-appointed magician, shared a similar magical vision of Vivien, and his vision manifested soon after Fortune's under the guise of Nineue, the fatal sorceress of his 1951 novel *Porius* whom he identified as "Tennyson's Vivien".[476] Though Powys and Fortune were

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[474] Ibid., 130.
[475] Ibid., 128.
[476] John Cowper Powys, "The Characters of the Book," *Powys Newsletter* 4, Porius Issue (1974-5): 21.

contemporaries, there is no evidence that the two were familiar with each other's work beyond a brief gloss of Powys's *Glastonbury Romance* (1932) in Fortune's *Glastonbury: Avalon of the Heart*.[477] Like Fortune, Powys was an eclectic figure who extended his mind towards many disciplines and bodies of literature. His eclecticism was accompanied by many self-avowed eccentricities, some of which proved exceptionally vulgar, even from his own perspective. Therefore, to understand the depth of Nineue's characteristic and symbolic complexity, it is necessary to first unravel part of the elaborate tapestry of Powys's mind from which she was cut.

With over fifty publications to his name—including novels, poetry, short stories, essays and literary criticism, philosophical and psychological treatises, two autobiographies, and one play—Powys was a prolific writer. Despite such a significant literary output, much of his work went unnoticed in his own era and has continued to evade modern scholarship and general public interest. A likely reason that Powys has remained out of the literary mainstream is that, despite his oft critically acknowledged genius, his work is rooted in a complex and often controversial matrix of ideas that frequently incorporate elements of myth and pseudohistory. Walter Allen, a contemporary of Powys, considered the latter's "vast mythology of natural forces so alien to the temper of the age as to be impossible for many people to take seriously."[478] Morine Krissdóttir suggests that Powys's writings have continued to be widely scorned because they consistently fluctuate between two extreme poles of attractiveness and repulsiveness, ranging from lofty spiritual doctrines of transcendent human consciousness to excessively grotesque descriptions of Nature's most mundane functions—in either case proving a significant challenge for the average reader.[479]

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[477] Dion Fortune, *Glastonbury: Avalon of the Heart* (Wellingborough: Aquarian Press, 1986), 111.
[478] Walter Allen, *Tradition and Dream: The English and American Novel from the Twenties to our Time* (London: Phoenix House, 1964), 48.
[479] Morine Krissdóttir, *Descents of Memory: The Life of John Cowper Powys* (New York: Overlook Duckworth, 2007), 14.

In a similar sense, C. A. Coates implies that Powys's own ideological inconsistencies have made him a figure "who evokes both massive contempt and near idolatry". [480] And while readers are as likely to loathe Powys as they are to love him, like Tennyson's Vivien, it is his negative reputation that has largely kept any discussion of his work alive in academic and public circles.

Another reason for Powys's relegation to the margins of academic scholarship likely stems from his own identification as a magician and his seemingly fantastical worldview. Like Fortune, Powys was fascinated by the idea of an invisible realm behind the Natural world that could be accessed through the imagination. He spent much of his life developing a personal philosophy of "elementalism"—a sensual-spiritual alternative to orthodox religion which seeks to establish a supremely intimate relationship between oneself and the four primordial elements to the point of a convergence of self and nature. Powys's interest in Nature's magical underpinnings further drove him to develop his own meditative magical practices, the culmination of which was the self-declared ability to psychically project himself across great distances while maintaining bodily sensation. Though Powys and his work have frequently been criticised to the point of indecipherability, he was not under any delusion as to his own identity and intentions; as he declared in his second autobiography published in 1934: "my dominant life-illusion was that I was, or at least would eventually be, a magician".[481] While Powys described his magical occupation as an illusion, it was one he took no less seriously. He understood his role as a magician from a more popular perspective as one who could "exercise a certain supernatural control over my destiny and that of others".[482] Yet, in a much richer sense, he perceived his magical occupation as Fortune perceived her own role as a priestess of Isis: as "one who converts God's reality into his own

[480] C. A. Coates, *John Cowper Powys in Search of a Landscape* (London: Macmillan, 1982), 179.
[481] John Cowper Powys, *Autobiography* (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1934), 24.
[482] Ibid., 7.

reality, God's world into his own world, and God's nature into his own nature".[483] For Powys, magicianship was akin to godhood.

To give his magical station further grounding in reality, Powys undertook a self-bestowed psychospiritual quest in search of a lost mythological Golden Age. Alternatively described by G. Wilson Knight as a "Saturnian quest" and by Krissdóttir more broadly as a "magical quest", both critics have acknowledged Powys's ambitious quest as the chief goal of his lifetime and the subject at the heart of most, if not all, of his most popular work. Like Fortune's magical pursuit of sexual equilibrium, Powys's quest took him to the deepest reaches of world history and mythology. Wilson Knight writes that Powys constantly searched "the mists of antiquity for the buried splendour of that golden age whose lord was Cronos, or Saturn."[484] Krissdóttir, who further labels the Age of Cronos as the "heroic" or "Promethean" Age, puts this Age into more definite terms of traditional Western hero myths and Jungian psychology. The Golden Age of Cronos, Krissdóttir writes, represents "the union of opposites, the embrace of the self with the not-self. The hero, the ego-consciousness, of necessity sees life as a duality of good-evil, life-death, consciousness-unconsciousness. The hero is the light, the intellect, the male who rescues and then unites himself with the dark, the unconscious, the female."[485] While informed by the moralistic dualism of Promethean myth to a certain degree, Krissdóttir further acknowledges that Powys's imagined Golden Age espouses an essential singularity that is not to be found in heroic Western myths but can be located more clearly in "primitive" Taoist and Welsh thought. As Krissdóttir writes: "To the Taoist and the primitive, the conscious and the unconscious are *not* equal partners: the *unconscious* contains all dualities—both good and evil, light and dark, male and female."[486]

[483] Ibid., 25.
[484] G. Wilson Knight, *The Saturnian Quest: A Study of the Prose Work of John Cowper Powys* (London: Methuen, 1964), 19.
[485] Morine Krissdóttir, *John Cowper Powys and the Magical Quest* (London: Macdonald, 1980), 38-39.
[486] Ibid., 39; emphasis in original.

Somewhat mirroring Dante's descent into Hell, Powys's quest for the Golden Age led him down to the darkest depths of the unconscious where rather than finding merely the essence of Cronos, the All-Father, he also discovered the spirit of Rhea, the Great Mother. For Powys, this divine pair, like the Qabalistic Chokmah and Binah, became symbolic of the primordial Whole.[487]

Similar to Fortune, the nature of Powys's magicianhood and his quest for the Golden Age was principally informed by his incessant study of the relationship between man and woman. At the heart of Powys's studies were the considerations of separate masculine and feminine consciousnesses and the constant struggle between the two which he considered responsible for "the whole difference between good and evil."[488] In his philosophical work, *The Art of Happiness*, Powys describes this struggle between the sexes in terms of an impersonal lust associated with the masculine archetype and a general wickedness associated with the feminine archetype. Speaking first of man's characteristic lust, Powys writes: "Now there is a 'Cerne Giant' in every man . . . who wants to make love to his woman as if to a strange woman, as if to any woman, as if to womanhood in the abstract, as if to the depersonalized essence of femininity."[489] As Wilson Knight suggests, in the symbol of the Cerne Giant Powys conflates masculine lust with what he considers the "root-evil" of the universe—sadism.[490] As is broadly demonstrated throughout *Porius*, Powys believes masculine lust—in another sense the sadistic quest of the feminine—to be the predominant breeder of war and violence and a general blight upon the world.

The Cerne Giant of masculine consciousness finds its feminine equivalent in the form of the "all-devouring Python" or "Lamia-Demon", which for Powys represents woman in her

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[487] John Cowper Powys, *Obstinate Cymric, Essays 1935-47* (Carmarthen: Druid Press, 1947), 83.
[488] John Cowper Powys, *Porius*, ed. Judith Bond and Morine Krissdóttir (New York: Overlook Duckworth, 2007), 60; hereafter cited *Porius*.
[489] John Cowper Powys, *The Art of Happiness* (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1935), 110.
[490] Knight, *Saturnian Quest*, 39.

wicked aspect—consuming, destructive, emasculating. When a woman expresses this serpentine aspect of her consciousness, Powys observes, even the most resolute man's "dignity, his self-possession, his powerfulness, his masterfulness, his self-importance, [is] brought down and [his] unfledged, unfrocked, undefended, un-armoured, naked identity *exposed*."[491] Therefore, where masculine lust's ultimate end is the destruction of the world, the end of feminine wickedness is the annihilation of man himself. While Powys could be considered something of a nihilist based on his assessment of the more negative aspects of masculine and feminine consciousness, he maintained a steadfast belief in humanity's inherent goodness, and his diagnoses of the illnesses he perceived plaguing human consciousness ultimately made his path to the Golden Age—notably an Age of pacifism—much clearer.

While Powys was fascinated by the distinct natures of masculine and feminine sexuality, he harboured a neurotic obsession with the essence of the feminine. From a young age his mind fixated on feminine forms in the real world, particularly those of young girls. Yet it was not the femininity of these girls that attracted Powys but the inherent androgyny that the girlish body appeared to him to espouse. As he writes, the girls he witnessed in the real world "were not girls to me at all—they were only quiet ineffective boys".[492] Additionally, whenever he encountered a girl, he perceived only "a feminine person, almost a feminine man".[493] The girlish body, while an object of Powys's self-acknowledged public voyeurism, was the primary site in which he glimpsed the ultimate goal of his magical quest. As he further explains:

> What I worshipped in those days to a point of idolatrous aberration, are hardly of the feminine sex at all! It is as if I had been born into this world from another planet—certainly not Venus: Saturn possibly!—where there was a different sex altogether

[491] Powys, *Art of Happiness*, 110-111.
[492] Powys, *Autobiography*, 70.
[493] Ibid., 206.

> from the masculine and feminine that we know. It is of this sex, of this Saturnian sex, that I must think when in the secret chamber of my mind I utter the syllable ‘girl.’[494]

More than just emblematic of a “Saturnian sex”, the girlish form seemed to Powys to contain within it the very seed of the Golden Age.

Spurred on by a tireless mythologising of his own life, Powys associated the essence of femininity and the girlish body with the mythical figure of the sylph—an elemental air spirit. In the figure of the sylph Powys identified a “type of feminine loveliness, evasive, aerial, characterless as flowing water” that was characterised by a supernatural nature “more girlish than girls”.[495] By employing the girlish body as an imaginative stimulus, Powys was able to distil in his mind “a kind of Platonic essence of sylph-hood, not exactly virginal sylphid-ness, but the state of being-a-Sylph carried to such a limit of tenuity as almost to cease to have any of the ordinary feminine attributes.”[496] The more abstracted Powys’s ideal sylph-image became in his imagination the more obsessive he became. Indeed, the search for his ideal sylph-girl in the real world drove him virtually to madness and a desire “to destroy everything that is not sylph-hood.”[497] Powys never went to such destructive lengths, either in his mind or in the physical world, and his perfect sylph eventually manifested in his long-time lover, Phyllis Playter. Overtly demure, docile, and childish of frame, Phyllis was Powys’s elemental feminine ideal made flesh. As he reveals in his diary, Powys felt it was “like sleeping with a child of twelve to sleep with this girl.”[498] A highly problematic and paedophilic statement in the present era, Krissdóttir suggests that such troubling expressions from Powys often illuminate the method by which he mythologised his own life and, in this case, his association of Phyllis’s childish nature with the mythical figure of Persephone. Krissdóttir argues that such statements do not seek to fetishize Phyllis’s puerile physicality in

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[494] Ibid., 206.
[495] Ibid., 206.
[496] Ibid., 205.
[497] Ibid., 275.
[498] Diary entry reproduced in Krissdóttir, *Descents*, 285; emphasis in original diary entry.

terms of a literal human girl but rather idealise her as the primordial child born of earth goddess Demeter.[499] Powys therefore considered Phyllis's delicate frame not only as a physical representation of his sylphic ideal and he ultimately found that the feminine essence it contained expressed the very power of Nature itself. As Krissdóttir proposes, Phyllis "conjoined in one frail body the two worlds that [Powys] sought: the material world—nature manifested—and the magical otherworld." Moreover, Powys identified in Phyllis the vital spirit of the Golden Age he sought to rediscover.

The influence of the sylph on Powys's imagination, particularly through the exquisitely intimate medium of Phyllis, was so powerful on Powys's imagination that he eventually located his feminine ideal within his own personality.[500] A subscriber to the idea of the human soul's inherent bisexuality, Powys was keenly aware of his own bisexual nature and the complex essence of his soul's feminine side, which he felt was both positively sylphic and negatively Pythonic; Powys admitted that "towards things and people who attract me my feelings resemble those of an enthusiastic young girl" while at the same time acknowledged that "deep in my nature lies the vice of a sadistic woman". Something of a twentieth-century Tiresias, Powys keenly observed the struggle between his masculine and feminine aspects to assert dominance and he often felt the feminine influence to be unbearably oppressive. He maintained a persistent fear of the power and potentiality of the feminine over his own being, which he summarised in a particularly peculiar yet revealing account about walking his dog Thora:

> I had occasion ere long, as may be believed, to realize that the companion of my walks belonged to the feminine sex, that fatal sex with whose existence, when I tried under the influence of Plato to obliterate it, the sun and the moon had gone out, and the realization that until this dog's death all my walks upon the surface of the grain-bearing earth were to be, so to speak, "feminized" caused me an epoch of extraordinary suffering! A gulf of femininity opened beneath my feet. It made me shudder with a singular revulsion. Everything I looked at in Nature — well can I

[499] Krissdóttir, *Descents*, 285.
[500] Powys, *Autobiography*, 275.

> remember one particular walk when this happened — presented itself to me as a repetition of the feminineness of Thora! I could no longer enjoy the singing of the birds. They might be feminine birds! I loathed the thought that so many of the trees and the flowers possessed feminine organs. The thing went so far with me that I became panic-stricken lest I myself should develop feminine breasts, breasts with nipples, resembling the dugs of Thora. . . . Having come with such imaginative intensity to visualize my provocative sylphs as beings who yielded so completely to my embraces that there was no solidity left in them, I began to feel as if there were no longer any real solidity left in Nature, as if, whichever way I turned, the firm substance of the earth would "go in."[501]

For much of his adult life, Powys feared that femininity, more precisely his feminine side, would ultimately consume him. However, in his fear of the feminine—and so of himself—resided the ultimate goal of his magical quest. As so many philosophical and poetic minds before his had sought to communicate, and as Fortune and Jung were coming to understand in his own age, Powys recognised that "the sleeping-place of the Age of Gold is in the depths of every human heart; and to this all must revert".[502] He knew that to complete his quest for the Golden Age he would have to "go in" to—literally allow himself to be devoured by—the feminine realm of the subconscious and assimilate himself with whatever waited within. It is under this supremely complex feminine principle—at once encompassing fear, sylphidness, androgyny, self-assimilation, and ultimately Saturnian wholeness—that Powys's Nineue operates.

Powys's obsession with feminine sexual consciousness reaches its climax in the figure of Nineue, who stands as one of the most symbolically-loaded characters in his novel, *Porius*. At almost sixteen-hundred pages, *Porius* is a monumental book that Powys described as "the chief work of [my] lifetime" and Krissdóttir suggests is more biographical than his 1934 *Autobiography*.[503] With its overwhelming narrative blend of history, mythology, psychology, alchemy, religion, and war, its forty-nine characters, surgically precise

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501 Ibid., 222-223.
502 John Cowper Powys, *Morwyn* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1937), 320.
503 John Cowper Powys to Louis Wilkinson, 18 August 1949, in *Letters of John Cowper Powys to Louis Wilkinson, 1935-1956*, ed. Louis Wilkinson (London: Macdonald, 1958), 267; Krissdóttir, *Descents*, 373.

descriptions of the most mundane details, and seemingly limitless depth of meaning, Powys's "Romance of the Dark Ages" seems to transcend genre and, as Krissdóttir suggests, is virtually impossible to summarise.[504] Powys himself considered his work as primarily a historical novel while many critics have come to read it as a war story informed by the geopolitics of the Second World War. But it is also an Arthurian novel, with Arthur, the Emperor of Britain, casting a significant shadow over the narrative and Myrddin and Nineue—Powys's Merlin and Vivien—playing essential parts in the titular character's destiny. While all of these frameworks offer helpful starting points into the novel, little about the novel remains static; its genre, themes, and concerns seem to shift from page to page, paragraph to paragraph, sentence to sentence. It therefore invites, and even requires, the reader to entertain an unrestrained imagination.

The entirety of *Porius* takes place over one week, from 18 October to 25 October, 499 in Northern Wales. While the perspective from which the novel is told often changes, the chief character remains the titular Porius, the son of Einion and the descendent of the renowned Brythonic leader Cunedda. Porius is next in line to the throne of Edeyrnion, a kingdom granted to the Celtic Brythons by the Romans under the condition that they maintained control over the indigenous tribes and swore allegiance to Rome. The Brythons find themselves in constant conflict with the "forest people", a native race seeking to restore matriarchal order to the land. When the kingdom discovers that the Saxons are steadily making their way towards Edeyrnion, the forest people, led by "three ancient aunties" known as the Modrybedd and a Druid, plot to join the invading forces. Porius is soon informed that Arthur, Emperor of Britain, has begun his march to meet the Saxons in battle and has sent forth Myrddin Wyllt, his advisor, Gwendydd, the sorcerer's sister, Nineue, the sorcerer's mistress, and Medrawd, the emperor's nephew, to assist Porius's father, the ailing prince

[504] Ibid., 371.

Einion. As a result of Einion's increasingly impotent leadership, Porius and his foster brother, Rhun, must shoulder the burden of maintaining order within the kingdom. Following a series of bloody battles, and with the aid of Arthur's host, the Brythons momentarily subdue the encroaching Saxons and their indigenous allies. During the ensuing peacetime Porius is involved in a series of transformative and evermore spectacular events, including marrying his cousin Morfydd to solidify his succession to the throne of Edeyrnion, mating with Creiddylad, the last of the legendary Cewri giants, witnessing the rebirth of the mythological woman-owl Blodeuwedd, and, in the final chapter of the novel, rescuing Myrddin from the mountain tomb in which Nineue has buried him. The novel ends as Porius reflects on a newfound sense of maturity and psychological liberty that will aid him as future leader of the Brythons.

Despite these adventures, Powys believed Nineue, not Porius, to be "in many ways the most interesting [character] in the book."[505] Dubbed "Tennyson's Vivien", Nineue serves as one of the novel's primary antagonists, espousing the "quite special sort of pitiless craft and cunning" that has become inseparable from Tennyson's enchantress.[506] Yet, despite an open indebtedness to Tennyson, Powys also suggests that his enchantress possesses a much grander symbolic meaning than the "wicked sorceress-love" of the *Idylls*.[507] Much like Fortune's Vivien, Powys's Nineue is a more enigmatically dynamic female figure than most Victorians and early Modernists generally imagined Tennyson's Vivien to be. As Robin Wood suggests, Nineue occupies a morally ambiguous space in Powys's imagination that ultimately places her beyond the Westernised Christian limits of good and evil.[508] Powys's Nineue therefore stands at an amoral intersection of world history, myth, and religion.

[505] Powys, "Characters," 21.
[506] *Porius*, 745.
[507] Powys, "Characters," 21.
[508] Robin Wood, "A Quest for 'Feminine consciousness' in John Cowper Powys's *Porius*," *International Journal of Welsh Writing in English* 9 (2022): 20.

Acknowledged in the early pages of *Porius* as the most powerful and most fatal woman in all of Britain, Nineue is the product of Powys's sublimely intricate synthesis of history and mythology that extends well beyond the canonical, cultural, and geographical boundaries of Anglo-European Arthurian tradition.[509] Powys writes that Nineue-ferch-Avallach—that is Nineue, daughter of Avallach—can initially be identified within the Welsh tradition of "mysterious goddesses" who inhabited the ancient lakes of the Welsh countryside; he further suggests that she can also be detected in the wider mythologic tradition of Avalon, particularly at the legendary site at Glastonbury. Though maintaining a firm grounding in the insular mythological traditions of Britain, Powys acknowledges that Nineue's conceptual roots can be located far earlier in the pre-Homeric and -Hesiodic mythologies of Greece and even beyond. In a similar sense to Tennyson's refusal to reduce the characters and symbols in the *Idylls* to simple "this means that" assertions, Powys refused to equate Nineue with any one mythological figure holding a "fixed academic place in any fixed academic mythology."[510]

A self-described "Obstinate Cymric", Powys was exceptionally proud of his Welsh heritage. *Porius* can therefore be read as a veritable love letter to the people, traditions, and rich mythology of the country where he spent the last thirty years of his life. While virtually every aspect of the novel is directed towards aggrandising the mythical and historical legacies of Wales, it is Nineue who Powys most intimately ties to these national legacies by way of her extraordinary pedigree. One of Nineue's defining traits is that she is a pure-blooded Ffichtiaid, or Pict, and she finds herself in a unique position as one of the last surviving women of her race. A mysterious race from the northern-most reaches of Wales, the Ffichtiaid are said in the novel to have appeared in the country "as if out of the bowels of the

[509] *Porius*, 81, 213.
[510] Powys, "Characters," 21; *Memoir*, 2:127.

earth", arriving ages before their mortal enemies, Powys's fictional "forest people".[511] For a time, the Ffichtiaid were the slaves of the legendary Welsh giants, the Cewri, and the Celtic Gwyddylaid (the Scots). It is believed that the Ffichtiad came to outlive their masters and eventually usurped the remaining Cewri and Gwyddylaid by inspiring an ominous sense of fear, a feeling which Nineue continues to rouse in many of the novel's characters.[512] Nineue's genealogy becomes more fantastical as the novel progresses, with Medrawd—whom Powys identified as "Tennyson's Mordred"—claiming that the Ffichtiaid arrived in Britain from none other than the mysterious Welsh otherworld of Annwn.[513] Another rumour coming from Porius's foster brother, claims that the Ffichtiaid are direct descendants of the heroic Odyssean Greeks who struggled to navigate the perilous Aegean waters on their way home from the Trojan War.[514] Most of the novel's characters take both Medrawd's and Rhun's "histories" of Nineue's people as equally viable historical truths, the effect of which blurs the boundary between the history and the mythology of Nineue's people. Consequentially, while these histories acknowledge Nineue's bloodline as among the eldest and most prestigious to settle in Wales, they also establish her as a pedigreed outsider and a potential existential threat.

In a similar manner to Fortune's development of Vivien, Powys accentuates Nineue's extraordinary lineage with richly detailed, often sublime and otherworldly, descriptions of her physicality. The reader is first introduced to Myrddin's mistress through the eyes and imagination of Porius. As the liaison between the Brythons and Arthur's camp, Porius arrives at the tent of Myrddin's sister, the distinguished Lady Gwendydd. His gaze is immediately drawn towards a perforated screen, behind which Gwendydd and her attendant Nineue prepare themselves to greet Porius's diplomatic band. Though Porius finds Gwendydd's

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[511] *Porius*, 472.
[512] Ibid., 466.
[513] Ibid., 525.
[514] Ibid., 658.

beauty radiant and her physical proportions perfect, his more "lascivious" attention fixates squarely on the demure figure of Nineue. He notes that her head is strangely small and covered with dark brown curls that look rather "boyish"; "this head of dusky enchantment" appears to him as if "in perpetual movement, flickering and hovering and undulating like a bird's nest of dark twigs at the top of a slender tree." Her attractive face is accentuated by a pair of enthralling eyes which strike him as "unearthly".[515] She is finely dressed in the green and gold livery of Arthur's court, though Porius suspects that this elegant raiment does not suit the woman beneath and rather gives "the impression of concealing a soft, silky, and slippery skin."[516] As he considers this strange woman, images of "wicked-innocent little girls in the slim snake shapes of liliths and lamias, twisting and turning and twining in the madness of unsatisfied desire" slither from the cracks in the screen into his imagination.[517]

Porius's first impressions of Nineue recall many of the hallmark attributes of her nineteenth- and twentieth-century predecessors. She possesses the dusky beauty and tree-like visage of Robinson's Vivian; her penetrating and unearthly eyes match those of Fortune's seemingly ageless priestess; most apparently, she projects the disturbing, practically writhing, sensuality of every serpentine femme fatale since Keats's Lamia. Her green and gold dressings place her squarely in the tradition of all the green-robed Viviens from Tennyson to Fortune, while Powys's association of green and gold livery with Arthur's court—the court of Pen*dragon*—is evocative of the apocalyptic green-gold dragon of Lawrence's *Apocalypse* who reigns symbolically over ages of enlightenment. While Porius's initial aesthetic assessment of Nineue does not reinvent Vivien's character at large, the invocation of so many Vivien-images in one portrait underscores the psychological and transcendent symbolism of Powys's Nineue and her predecessors.

[515] Ibid., 83, 86.
[516] Ibid., 83.
[517] Ibid., 84.

To further illustrate this point, Porius's first description of Nineue not only evokes traditional Arthurian aesthetics but also ties her to two of the world's oldest mythical and literary traditions in the figure of Lilith and *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. While Porius circuitously associates Nineue with Lilith by way of his presumption about her snake-like skin, Myrddin provides a more direct association through his comparison of the slipperiness of Nineue's skin to "the smoothness of the leaf-shadows round the waist of Adam's first wife".[518] The shadow of Lilith's influence falls on Nineue in much the same way it does on Fortune's Vivien; it is an influence that oscillates between the predatory demon of Judeo-Christian tradition and the Divine Mother of many esoteric and occult traditions. And where Porius on the one hand posits Nineue to be a wicked little girl beneath her royal livery, on the other he appears to develop her out of an unconscious invocation of some of the earliest human symbols of divinity.

In the Mesopotamian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the spirit *ki-sikil-líl-lá-ke*—identified by scholars as a prototype of the eminent Judeo-Christian Lilith—makes her home in the trunk of a great tree belonging to the Queen of Heaven, Inanna (also known as Ishtar).[519] Lilith shares the tree with a serpent who nests in its roots and a lesser deity "zu" bird called Anzû who abides in its branches. Lilith's presence in *Gilgamesh* is short-lived, and she later disappears into the desert after the eponymous hero chops down the sacred tree. Yet while her appearance is brief and her details few, Porius's first portrait of Nineue intriguingly evokes all the primary symbols contained within the ancient scene: he puts Nineue into spiritual terms by comparing her to demonic liliths and lamias; he presumes that the skin beneath her clothing must be like that of a serpent's; in one of his more curious observations, he describes her hair as akin to a bird's nest; finally, he imagines her as a "slender tree",

[518] Ibid., 76.
[519] *Gilgamesh and the Netherworld* in *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, trans. Andrew George (London: Penguin, 2002) 40-143.

thereby granting her some tangential relation to the sacred tree of Inanna, and even to the Queen of Heaven herself. From Porius's perspective, Nineue not only appears to evoke Lilith but the whole symbolic make-up of the Gilgameshian episode.

It is unlikely that Powys had this scene from *Gilgamesh* in mind when piecing Nineue together. Yet the potent symbolic resonances between Nineue and the Lilith episode in *Gilgamesh* underscore the seemingly limitless degrees of meaning contained within Powys's sorceress. Furthermore, Powys believed, as Jung and Fortune did, that every human mind contains "a dark-hidden store of race-memories . . . buried beneath . . . life's casual impressions. Images, scenes subtle and indescribable feelings, are stirred up from these sacred urns and vases at the bottom of the mind as the wind blows upon our face."[520] Such a belief implies that, regardless of Powys's conscious intent, the symbolic resonance between Nineue and the Gilgameshian Lilith contains some spark of universality and significance that pervades the "race-memory" of humanity. As a final point of comparison, the component parts of Lilith's Akkadian name have been roughly translated as "spiritual place" (*ki-sikil*), "spirit" (*líl*), and "water spirit" (*líl-lá-ke*); these translations bring Lilith, both as a minor spirit and as an aspect of the Queen of Heaven, squarely into the realm of the goddesses whom Powys associates with the primordial Welsh lakes and whom serve as a primary conceptual model for Nineue.[521]

The dynamic interplay between Powys's conscious and subconscious awareness of Nineue's worldly significance is paralleled only by Fortune's worldly occult awareness of Vivien. The result of these two comparable "methods" of awareness is two characters who appear conceptually identical. Yet despite entertaining parallel degrees of awareness regarding Vivien's mythical, historical, and literary complexities, Powys's highly sensual

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[520] John Cowper Powys, *A Philosophy of Solitude* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1933), 108.
[521] Beth E. McDonald, "In Possession of the Night: Lilith as Goddess, Demon, Vampire" in *Sacred Tropes: Tanakh, New Testament Literature, and Qur'an as Literature and Culture*, ed. Roberta Sterman Sabbath (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 177-178.

elementalist philosophy under which he develops Nineue stands in stark contrast to the almost pure psychism through which Vivien manifested in Fortune's imagination. Expounding upon Powys's philosophy, Wilson Knight writes that elementalism "urges us to cultivate the Wordsworthian power of feeling into the inanimate; to enjoy all nature, and especially its less obviously living manifestations, such as earth, stone, wind and sea, not haphazardly but by an act of will."[522] In a general sense, elementalism can be thought of as a conscious process of stripping natural objects—either animate or inanimate—down in the imagination to their respective primordial elements of earth, water, air, and fire. As in the theoretical practice of alchemy—a subject with which Powys was familiar and which permeates the narrative of *Porius*—the base elements are then transmuted, or reconfigured, within the imagination with the goal of personal psychic liberation, which can loosely be considered in terms of an elevation of the degree of one's consciousness.[523] What particularly sets Powys's elementalism apart from Fortune's psychism, and thus Nineue from Vivien, is Powys's broader acceptance of physical sexual intimacy as a useful way to engage the hidden primordial knowledge buried within the subconscious. To be clear, Powys was sceptical of sexual practices, and he believed that most people's understanding of sex amounted to a "desperate insane obsession, completely abstracted from the poetry of the elements and having no connection at all with the aesthetic beauty of bare limbs, bright eyes, warm breasts and floating hair."[524] However, he also understood from his own elementalist perspective, as exhibited by his relationship with Phyllis, that physical sex could bring the mind into intimate contact with the primordial elements through a psychical "stripping down" of the partner's body.

[522] Knight, *Saturnian Quest*, 20.
[523] Krissdóttir, *Magical Quest*, 130-131.
[524] Powys, *Autobiography*, 34.

Both the sensual and psychological aspects of Powys's elementalism are in constant operation throughout *Porius*, and as such, both work in different degrees towards the development of Nineue's character. In many cases, an instance of physical contact with Nineue is followed by a detailed psycho-sensual analysis of the interaction. Over the course of the novel Porius experiences three extraordinary encounters with Nineue, the first of which provides him with a moment of unusual sensual clarity. During Porius's initial visit to Gwendydd's tent, Nineue intentionally trips and falls into his arms, which excites his vivid imagination:

> it was as if he were pressing himself against something boneless, ribless, formless; something that was a yielding image of femininity in the abstract, the resilient, lithe magnetic, slippery Platonic idea of all the evasive allurements in the world that are the objects of impersonal desire.
>
> The form of Nineue, the softness of Nineue, the flexibility of Nineue, the colour of Nineue, the fragrance of Nineue, and a sort of immaterial emanation of the inmost identity of Nineue was embraced for those seconds by every portion of his body.
>
> No part of him was favoured above any other part. All had their share, and not only their share. All had all. There was nothing of Nineue that was not deliciously capable of being absorbed. And in the absorption of Nineue even for those brief seconds *there was a sensation of the unfathomable and the infinite*.[525]

The characteristic serpentine physicality associated with Vivien is still present in Porius's second description of Nineue; the litheness, the slipperiness, the softness, the flexibility. But here Powys starts to deconstruct Nineue's traditional serpent-body and replace its component parts with sense-informed psychic constructs. Her identity thus begins to develop under the influence of those "slippery" Platonic thought-objects which, however difficult to grasp in their entirety, are tentatively formed with respect to their unfathomability in the human mind. As the Platonic allusion further suggests, Nineue gradually embraces a widening vocabulary of metaphysical abstraction as the novel progresses. This second portrait of Nineue is also highlighted by an opposite process of character development to that of the first portrait

[525] *Porius*, 105; italics in original.

invoking Powys's elementalist process of stripping objects down to their primordial elemental parts. Instead of constructing and embodying her with tangible imagery, Porius works towards deconstructing and disembodying Nineue into her fundamental elemental components as a feminine entity.

Powys's distillation of Nineue's essence continues with an extraordinary psycho-sensual sexual encounter. The union between Porius and Nineue occurs one evening at the home of Brother John, Porius's long-time mentor. Porius arrives to find almost the whole house, including a convalescent Myrddin, asleep; only Nineue remains awake and resting on a floor-level couch. Unbeckoned by word or gesture, Porius joins her on the ground which, because of her overwhelming presence, seems to have transformed into the "floor of the universe". A single torch illuminates the entirety of the residence from above the couch, as if some primordial spark suspended in a cosmic abyss. Nineue's grey eyes devour Porius completely, appearing to him in the smouldering torchlight as "the eyes of the mother of Cronos"—that is Gaia, the primordial Earth Mother.[526] Ultimately finding that "sex is a side issue" for both himself and Nineue, Porius turns his attention inwards under the influence of Nineue's otherworldly embrace and discovers a host of mythic aspects, some of whom Fortune identifies with her Vivien, including Persephone, Aphrodite, the devil, and, most curiously, the Lernaean Hydra of Herculean fame.[527]

Though keenly aware of the sublime psychic potential Nineue's many visages espouse, during their sexual encounter Porius has "the impression that his caresses were only a minor element in a long-drawn-out, quietly muted ecstasy to which she had begun to abandon herself before he appeared on the scene at all, a subsexual sensuous ecstasy, practically identical with his self-centred 'cavoseniargizing.'"[528] As difficult to comprehend

[526] Ibid., 610.
[527] Ibid., 612.
[528] Ibid., 610-611.

as it is to pronounce, “cavoseniargizing” refers to Powys’s self-developed state of intensive meditation that acts as a key functionary component of elementalism.[529] Alternatively referred to by Powys as “mythologizing” and “cosmogonizing”, in *Porius* the meditative technique is described as a “trick of rapid mental journeys in various directions” and “a particular form of lotus eating” where the “soul [finds] itself able to follow every curve and ripple of [the] bodily sensations *and yet remain above them*”.[530] Porius further describes his own cavoseniargistic practice as a “secretive psycho-sensuous trick of ravishing the four elements with the five senses, and of doing it with these latter so fused together that it was like making love to the earth-mother herself”, and it is this trick that he suspects Nineue herself practices.[531]

While recognising the parallel nature of his and Nineue’s psycho-sensuous practices, Porius also perceives a significant difference in their respective methods: Nineue, he relates, “draws into herself the things she enjoys, whereas I fling myself into the things I enjoy.”[532] As such, Nineue’s cavoseniargizing is defined by a negative sensual magnetism through which she draws the surrounding elements into herself; in Porius this magnetism is reversed, as he projects his senses, indeed his very essence, outwards to engage the elements in their own respective states. According to Porius, this difference in polarity is the natural result of Nineue’s identity as a woman and his as a man. Such a sexual distinction is virtually identical to Fortune’s Qabalisitc considerations of primordial sexual magnetism. And while it is unclear how familiar Powys was with the precepts of Qabalah, in this instance, he likely would have recognised in Nineue the passive and negative female principle associated with Binah and in Porius the active and positive male force associated with Chokmah.

[529] See Robin Wood, “This Ridiculous Word ‘Cavoseniargizing’,” *The Powys Journal* 25 (2015): 185-194.
[530] *Porius* 86, 92, 93; italics in original.
[531] Ibid., 93-94, 466.
[532] Ibid., 611-612.

All conjecture aside, Powys's Nineue, like Fortune's Vivien, does not merely evoke feelings and images of divinity but actually possesses a vital spark of "divine power" that Porius can feel penetrating his very being.[533] This force is so overwhelming that he feels as though he "drew from that form between his hands in the ravishing of which he seemed to be ravishing . . . all the waters of the Divine River itself and all the enchanted swamps and forests between Deganwy and Eryri, such a revelation about his fate in regard to the women of his life as he had never imagined could be revealed . . . by any woman to any mortal man." In this moment, Porius recognises Nineue as a literal avatar of the Earth Mother, and thus the principal object of his own cavoseniargistic practice. Yet, having encountered the divine objective of his mediational aims, Porius does not quite know how to feel about his intimate relations with Nineue:

> What Porius felt for Nineue was certainly not love. But on the other hand it could not be called unmixed lust. The odd thing about it was that it revealed itself—this queer strong link between them—as naturally, and easily, and as completely without shyness, as if they had been disembarking upon a familiar shore every inch of which they had known in former times and known together.[534]

Porius understands that the connection he has with Nineue is indeed strange and can hardly be described using simple language. The strangeness, more precisely the "queerness", of the link that Porius recognises binds him and Nineue has two potentially significant meanings: firstly, the link is "queer" in the sense that it seems to Porius to suspiciously transcend time; secondly, the link is more revealingly "queer" in the sense that it invokes the androgynous primordial Whole, and so Powys's sought after Golden Age. Thus, far from merely reinforcing the opposing principles of the masculine and the feminine, Porius and Nineue's union is, much like the goal of Fortune's magical work, an instance of equilibrated sexual polarity whereby the boundary of sexual polarity dissolves and is replaced by an

[533] Ibid., 611.
[534] Ibid., 614.

interpersonal "link" which is more specifically the shared sensation and consciousness of a primordial state of androgynous singularity. Lending further credence to this notion of primordial androgyny, Krissdóttir points out that "the myth of the Golden Age . . . does not end with the marriage of Eros and Psyche, it ends (or begins) with their divine child, the Androgyne, the original Whole."[535] The vital bond conceived by Porius and Nineue can be considered as the androgynous offspring of their union, and it is through this bond that Powys offers a glimpse of the Golden Age.

Porius's final and most symbolically charged interaction with Nineue occurs on the summit of yr Wyddfa (Snowdon), wherein Nineue entombs Myrddin at the end of the novel. As Porius approaches Myrddin's resting place, he finds Nineue astride a massive grey horse, as if a literal incarnation of the Celtic Rhiannon or Epona. His erotic impulse proves yet again too strong to resist and he leaps at the prospect of making a real child with her. Despite this strong progenitive pull, Porius's sexual desire is quickly dispelled by a wonderfully mystical phenomenon; as the sun begins to set over the mountain, the last rays of light strike Nineue, "and suddenly as if the sun were stretching out a last passionate pharos ray in search of some invisible *stele*, or 'death pillar,' on the very summit of yr Wyddfa, Nineue's figure under Porius's hand became transmuted into glowing gold." As Porius abandons himself to the supernaturally "red-gold" shimmer of Nineue's body, she intentionally exposes one of her breasts and in doing so breaks his momentary enthrallment; much to his disgust, Porius discovers that Nineue possesses an unusually large nipple on a small breast rather than a small nipple on a large breast which, owing to a childhood predisposition towards his mother's figure, he prefers. Before the erotic illusion can be completely shattered for Porius, Nineue pulls out "a small, hard, heavy, pear-shaped lump of iron ore" from between her thighs and hands it to him. Alluding to the myth of Cronos's deposition by Zeus (and further

[535] Krissdóttir, *Magical Quest*, 39.

to Myrddin's identity as Cronos himself), the ore, Nineue relates, "has been in [Myrddin's] body since the lightning struck him on the day he fell." She tells Porius that it can finally be returned to him because "he has escaped from the wheel that turns." As the golden glow begins to fade from her body, Nineue leaves Porius to recover Myrddin from his tomb.[536]

While almost limitless symbolic meaning underlies this scene, Nineue's golden transformation and her subsequent production of a stone imply that Powys derived much of her meaning from the language and symbolism of alchemy. Of the many narratives weaving through *Porius*, Krissdóttir convincingly argues that the novel contains a subtly embedded alchemical narrative that invokes each of the seven stages of the alchemical process.[537] Powys's knowledge of alchemy only survives outside *Porius* in minor fragments, yet the prevalence of alchemical language and symbolism within the novel suggest that he recognised alchemy to be a timeless human tale of self-discovery, rich in narrative power and existential veracity. And while examples of Powys's alchemical knowledge can be found through *Porius*, no aspect of the novel illustrates his alchemical considerations of Nineue better than the events at the climactic end of the novel.

Alchemy is a dense and esoteric subject. Yet, regarding this study, only the concepts of the *prima materia* and the philosopher's stone itself need be understood to glean the deeper psychological significance of Powys's Nineue. Beginning with the *prima materia*, it is the ubiquitous starting material that is required for the alchemical *opus* and the generation of the philosopher's stone. As described in the 1602 alchemical compendium, *Theatrum Chemicum*, alchemists have "compared the 'prima materia' to everything, to male and female, to the hermaphroditic monster, to heaven and earth, to body and spirit, chaos, microcosm, and the confused mass; it contains in itself all colors and potentially all metals;

[536] *Porius*, 742-747.
[537] Krissdóttir, *Magical Quest*, 127-170.

[to the alchemists] there is nothing more wonderful in the world, for it begets itself, conceives itself, and gives birth to itself."[538] In a Powysian sense, the *prima materia* is an amalgam of the four principle elements of earth, water, air, and fire before they became separate and distinct. It is from the *prima materia* that the philosopher's stone is ultimately generated, and like the primal substances from which it is derived, the stone has been alternatively identified as a divine child, a hermaphrodite, an elixir of immortality, a dragon, and a *menstruum universal* (universal solvent). One of the most important details of the philosopher's stone, particularly regarding the discussion of Nineue, is that the stone's vessel is said to be a virginal or cosmic womb which is fertilised by the god Mercury, who for the alchemists is a bisexual deity synonymous with the female *Anima Mundi*.

The final scene of *Porius*, in which Powys most clearly reveals the significance of the Porius-Nineue-Myrddin triad, can be read in terms of the last stage of the alchemical *opus*—known as coagulation—in which the *prima materia* is transmuted into the philosopher's stone. There are three ways in which the final stage of the alchemical process manifests at the end of *Porius*. The first is with respect to Nineue's symbolic transmutation into gold. In plain terms, she is at once emblematic of the *prima materia* and the philosopher's stone. Powys most clearly puts Nineue into terms of the *prima materia* during her sexual encounter with Porius: she is stripped down to her primordial elements and identified by Porius as an avatar of the Earth Mother, or a microcosmic emanation of Nature. The consideration of Nineue as emblematic of the philosopher's stone starts with her colouration. Under the light of the setting sun Nineue glimmers with a "red-gold" hue, a shade that is traditionally associated with the philosopher's stone. The alchemical significance of Nineue's colouration is further accentuated by her broader association with the symbol of the dragon, which was for many

[538] From Theobaldus de Hoghelande, *Liber de Alchemiae difficultatibus* in *Theatrum Chemicum* (Ursellis, 1602), 1:178-179; Translation by Paul Kugler in *The Alchemy of Discourse: Image, Sound and Psyche* (Einsiedeln: Daimon, 2002), 112.

alchemists the primary symbol of the philosopher's stone. Far from an arbitrary combination of colour and symbol, the red-gold dragon that Powys's Nineue collectively evokes recalls the conceptual vermillion dragon of D. H. Lawrence's *Apocalypse*. From Lawrence's studious perspective, the red-gold dragon stands as the symbol of heroic ages but also as the symbol of primordial existence. It is thus the dragon that symbolically reigned over the "First Age" and will continue to reign over subsequent Golden Ages.[539] Under such symbolic conditions, Nineue's transmutation is in itself emblematic of the Golden Age Powys sought to recover. As a final consideration, Nineue's dualistic embodiment as *prima materia* and philosopher's stone suggests the natural cyclicality of the alchemical process and of Golden Ages—the *prima materia* becomes the philosopher's stone becomes the *prima materia* and so on forever.

A second expression of coagulation can be perceived in Nineue's symbolic relationship with the sun. To elucidate this concept I turn to Jung's psychological archetypes and alchemical studies, with which Powys would likely have been familiar. From a Jungian perspective, as a woman, Nineue is a natural manifestation of the Mother archetype—that is, the primordial image of woman that resides in the unconscious mind of all humans.[540] Of the many symbols that are associated with the Mother archetype, the womb stands for Jung as one of the most prevalent and potent, for, as he cryptically writes: "In the womb of the mother lies the wisdom of the father."[541] Simultaneously symbolic of the source of life and the initiation of death, the severe symbolic duality of the womb aids in the dual-distinction of the Mother archetype as both benevolent and terrifying. By virtue of her archetypal womanhood, Powys's Nineue is inextricably bound up with the symbol of the womb, and as

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[539] Lawrence, *Apocalypse*, 129.
[540] Carl Gustav Jung, "The Psychological Aspects of the Kore" in *Aspects of the Feminine*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (London: Routledge, 2003), 165.
[541] Carl Gustav Jung to Walter Lewino, 21 April 1948, in *C. G. Jung Letters*, ed. Gerhard Adler and Aniela Jaffé, trans. R. F. C. Hull, vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 499.

such, she by extension symbolises the alchemical "vessel" which houses the philosopher's stone. The sun is for alchemists the principal symbol of the god Mercury and the final stage of coagulation is frequently described as Mercury's fertilisation of the alchemical vessel, represented as the conjunction of the sun and moon (another symbol of woman). Nineue's transmutation under the sun's rays essentially replicates this alchemical language of fertilisation; the sunlight falls on her and from her fertilised "vessel" comes a stone which she suggestively procures from between her thighs as if in a literal act of birth.

The third and last alchemical suggestion in the scene on yr Wyddfa can be read in Nineue's burial of Myrddin. In this final symbolic instance of coagulation, Nineue's role as the alchemical vessel is extended to yr Wyddfa. The symbolic extension of Nineue as the Earth Mother into the mountain itself instantiates yr Wyddfa as both a womb and a tomb, and so a symbol of the natural cycle of life and death. Literally translated from the Welsh as "the tomb", yr Wyddfa seems rather to Porius to be full of the regenerative potential of the womb:

> [It was] as if he stood on an earth crust that covered a cosmogonic cavern wherein the bones and ashes and the mouldering dust of gods and men and beasts and birds and fishes and reptiles had been gathered into a multitudinous congregated compost, out of which by the creative energy of Time new life could be eternally spawned; spawned, it might be, for the use of other universes, when this one had been dissolved.[542]

Considered from a more formulaic alchemical perspective, yr Wyddfa plays the role of the alchemical vessel, Nineue acts as the fertilising Mercury, and Myrddin stands in as the philosopher's stone. When Porius finally retrieves Myrddin from within the mountain, he discovers a figure with the "hideously ungainly posture" of a new-born—yet another symbol of the philosopher's stone frequently employed by alchemists.[543] In another sense that more closely aligns with Powys's magical quest, with yr Wyddfa acting as a symbolic extension of

[542] *Porius*, 748.
[543] Ibid., 747.

Nineue, it is as if Nineue herself gave birth to Myrddin as Rhea had once given birth to Cronos, and so to the Golden Age.

If Powys did keep the precepts of alchemy firmly in mind while writing *Porius*, he was likely drawn, as Jung had been, to the subject's psychological application. Accordingly, the psychological implications of Nineue's alchemical attributes can be described using Jung's psychoanalytical language of alchemy. Jung perceived that the endgame of alchemy had little to do with the procurement of a literal stone of immortality, and as he writes, "it was clear to the more astute alchemists that the *prima materia* (alchemical starting material, or first matter) of the art was man himself." The philosopher's stone of Jung's "psychic alchemy" is thus complete psychic individuation, which occurs when the shadow of the unconscious self is integrated with the "ego ideal"—the perfected image of the self which the ego aspires to meet—of the conscious self. Regarding man in particular, the road to psychic individuation begins when he becomes aware of his unconscious feminine side—his *anima*. But as Jung posits, to truly achieve individuation, man must not only become aware of but must also embrace the unconscious side of himself. In doing so, man dispels the illusion of who he thinks he *ought to be* and comes to understand who he *really is*—the totality of both his shadow and his ego ideal.

When considered in Jung's terms of psychic alchemy, the final scene in *Porius* projects as a monumental psychological event. Indeed, the climactic action on yr Wyddfa can be read as Porius's moment of psychic individuation, with Nineue representing the shadow of his unconscious and Myrddin the perfected image of his ego ideal. Throughout Porius's relationship with Nineue, he must constantly grapple with the threat she poses to himself and to Myrddin. Yet even when he perceives her to be at her most fatal during their sexual encounter, he cannot help but feel that she is in some sense part of himself. The same can be said of Myrddin, who as a counsellor to Porius, a prophet, and reincarnation of Cronos is

collectively emblematic of the type of wise ruler Porius hopes to become for Edeyrnion. Nineue's entombment of Myrddin within yr Wyddfa thus mirrors the integration of Porius's shadow and ego ideal. And while the stone that Nineue gives to Porius is symbolic of the fruits of his psychological labours, his real reward is a vision of the Golden Age:

> Balanced as he was above [Myrddin in his tomb], from beneath which rose a phosphorescent gleam of inconceivable decomposition, Porius, as he swung his thunderbolt, had the feeling that he was suspended above the whole rondure of the earth, and that worlds upon worlds of every sort surrounded him, and that he, the child of Time, was absolutely alone with this physical mirage, this primordial abyss, this necessary illusion, this holy nothing, that is called Space.
>
> And he became aware of an unfathomable power within him, a power that was at once divine and human, animal and elemental, a power that could be drawn upon at will, not to create or to destroy, but simply *to enjoy*: *gorsob larry ong*, "enjoy to the end."
>
> . . . .
>
> More and more strongly did Porius get the feeling that in his isolation on this peak of the planet . . . he was reliving an experience he had had long ago when the world was young.[544]

As exemplified by Porius, the Golden Age is a state of mind. And as Powys suggests, such a state will be achieved not in spite of Nineue but only when the human mind can finally embrace her in all her feminine aspects, from the wicked to the divine.

If the nineteenth century can be considered as an embryonic stage of Vivien's development and the early twentieth century the maturing, or formal, stage, then the writings of Fortune and Powys signal the apotheotic stage—the pinnacle of Vivien's nineteenth- and twentieth-century development. Yet, in another sense, Fortune's Vivien and Powys's Nineue represent the end of Vivien's development that began with Tennyson, and so suggest a symbolic "death" of the character. Whether or not Fortune and Powys interpreted their characters as a coda to Tennyson's is of little significance. What is important is that they were both keenly aware that Vivien had lived and would go on to live many more lives

[544] *Porius*, 748-750.

beyond the literature and art she inhabited in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, for they recognised that it was in Vivien's divine nature to live, die, and come again.

Conclusion

Tennyson's Vivien may not have been the first nineteenth-century incarnation of the character, but no adaptation made her more culturally, socially, and artistically relevant in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Britain and America. Chiefly inspired by a relatively minor character in Malory, in 1856 Tennyson elevated Vivien alongside Guinevere, Enid, and Elaine as one of the chief women of modern Anglo-American Arthurian literature and art. Furthermore, Tennyson gave a significant voice to a character who speaks very little in medieval literature and often appears sporadically and briefly. Of course, Vivien's speech in the *Idylls* has not always been viewed as a progressive step for the character, and the venomous words she spouts have often been interpreted as a sign of feminine immaturity and indecency and a symptom of the broader decline in traditional Western male hegemonic power structures. Yet, while Tennyson's Vivien polarised much of her nineteenth and twentieth-century readership, her divisiveness (along with Tennyson's considerable fame) propelled her to the status of literary and artistic muse, and, as a further consequence of her infamy, she became the veritable modern archetype of the character.

For Tennyson, as well as many nineteenth- and twentieth-century authors and artists, the character of Vivien became a medium through which to explore the feminine aspect of the human spirit. Long before Jung intervened in the early twentieth century with his theory of the *anima* and *animus*, the idea of a feminine aspect in man and masculine aspect in woman was hardly a foreign concept for nineteenth-century artists, especially for Tennyson. As demonstrated by *The Palace of Art* (1832, 1842), from an early age he envisioned his own soul to be innately feminine. In *In Memoriam* (1850) his vision becomes more sexually dichotomous and he speaks of his admiration for a specific kind of "manhood fused with

female grace".[545] Later in the *Demeter* volume (1889), which also contains *Merlin and the Gleam*, he writes: "While man and woman still are incomplete, / I prize that soul where man and woman meet".[546] Vivien and Nimuë were for Tennyson symbolic of the "range" of his feminine spirit; Vivien the lowest and most chaotic aspect which brought him nearest to nihilism, and Nimuë the highest and most refined creative aspect which brought him closest to spiritual transcendency. Not all authors and artists who were influenced by Tennyson's Vivien envisioned the character in such a spiritual manner as the poet, and it is primarily in the works of Blunt, Robinson, Fortune, and Powys that the dualistic feminine spiritual vision of Vivien that Tennyson entertained begins to reappear. Tennyson's Vivien-Nimuë complex can therefore be considered a proto-Modernist development of the Vivien character. As is suggested by Powys's declaration of his Nineue as "Tennyson's Vivien", there is as much of the Modern feminine spirit in Tennyson's Vivien as there is the Victorian, and it is because of her ability to ideologically transcend her own era that her influence remained potent well into the twentieth century.

While nineteenth- and twentieth-century Anglo-American authors and artists frequently treated Vivien on their own terms and in the context of their own eras, the steady interest in the character across the two centuries indicates a near ubiquitous acknowledgement of Vivien's relevance to contemporary social, psychological, and mytho-religious discourses. Regarding the idea of feminine consciousness, Vivien's numerous guises in nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature and art highlight the conceptual instability of the "feminine" in Anglo-American minds near the turn of the century. Encompassing everything from a feminine demon to a divine Mother, and a sexual deviant to an angelic virgin, Vivien was a popular vehicle for the cross-century interrogation of the

[545] *In Memoriam*, CIX:17.
[546] *On One Who Affected an Effeminate Manner*, 1-2.

nature of the feminine. As this study argues, Vivien's development following Tennyson was not linear and she did not simply progress from demon to deity, thereby shedding her negative and destructive associations. Rather, like the broader development of Anglo-American feminine consciousness across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Vivien's character merely expanded to incorporate aspects of the demon, the deity, and many others. That is also to say, as the Anglo-American consciousness integrated new understandings of femininity, so too did Vivien grow into an increasing more complex feminine character. This notion of a multivalent femininity composed of intertwining matrices of good and bad, light and dark, demon and deity, was eventually made explicit by Jung in his writings on psychological alchemy and his theory of the Mother archetype. Jung's identification of the Mother archetype across historical, cultural, and mythological boundaries reconciled not only conflicted Western understandings of the "feminine" but also embedded Vivien in a timeless universal development of feminine understanding evinced by mythical and religious stories.

Despite this thesis engaging primarily with creative representations of Vivien, for many of the male authors discussed in this study Vivien was an imaginary projection of a real woman. The young Tennyson was enchanted by the beautiful yet insincere Rosa Baring. As a teenager, Yeats was infatuated with the playful Laura Armstrong before later musing on the fiery Irish nationalist, Maude Gonne. Richard Hovey had an affair with and later married the exceptionally clever Mrs. Edmund Russell (Henriette Knapp). Edwin Arlington Robinson ever pined after the free-spirited Emma Shepherd, who later married his older brother and was at the centre of the brothers' falling out. F. Scott Fitzgerald endured a passionate yet tumultuous marriage to the socialite Zelda Sayre. Powys mythologised the sylphic figure of Phyllis Playter to the point of neurotic obsession. The imaginary figure of Vivien provided these authors an outlet through which they could explore the nature of their respective romantic relationships, and she often manifests in their respective works as a projection of the

sexual frustration that came by way of their lovers' insincere feelings or outright rejections of the authors' advances. Whatever the nature of each author's romantic relationship with his real-life Vivien, the literary Vivien appears to have been a way to rationalise the complexities and contradictions of his mortal love. At the same, Vivien acts as a literary monument through which these authors can immortalise their muses; from this perspective, it can be thought that Vivien operates both as symbol of mortal love and as a method through which these authors can imaginatively tame their lover. Perhaps an attempt to flip the Merlin and Vivien script, literary creation appears to have been the only means by which these authors could maintain some semblance of control over their erotic fantasies. This is as close as these Merlins got to besting Vivien at her own game.

Though resonances of Tennyson's Vivien have significantly declined since Powys published *Porius* in 1951, the character has remained a steady presence in Anglo-American Arthurian literature and art. Both Mary Stewart and Marion Zimmer Bradley take a feminist approach to the character, with Stewart replacing Merlin with Nimue as Arthur's court enchanter in *The Last Enchantment* (1979) and Bradley dividing up the characters of Viviane, Niniane, and Nimue in *The Mists of Avalon* and making the "Lady of the Lake" one of the highest offices in a Celtic pagan hierarchy. In Bernard Cornwell's three-volume *Warlord Chronicles* (1995-1997), Nimue is an Irish orphan who becomes Merlin's priestess and lover before evolving into a religious fanatic who, like Tennyson's Vivien, seeks to reinstate the Old Gods of Britain. Bringing literature and art together, no medium has revivified Vivien's character more so than twenty-first century comic books and graphic novels. Matt Wagner's four-volume series *Madame Xanadu* (2008-2011) tells the story of Nimue (Madame Xanadu), an immortal magician who has been involved with some of the world's most important figures including Kublai Khan, Marie Antionette, and Jack the Ripper. In 2009, Mike Mignola introduced Nimue into his Hellboy universe as the most wicked and powerful

witch in British history. Mignola's multi-volume Nimue narrative begins with her resurrection in the present day by one of her sinister disciples. She assumes the title of the "Queen of Blood" and later "Goddess of War" as she seeks to kill Hellboy and reclaim dominion over Britain. Vivien has most recently appeared in Kieron Gillen and Dan Mora's *Once and Future* (2019-2022), an Arthurian horror fantasy wherein British Nationalists resurrect Arthur only to find that he is a murderous demon-tyrant who is hellbent on reclaiming Britain for himself. In Gillen and Mora's story, which includes a roboticised steampunk interpretation of Tennyson's Arthur, the title of "Nimue" is handed down through the ages and is bestowed on a woman named Mary, who also plays the role of Elaine as Galahad's mother. Though she initially aids Arthur in an effort to protect Galahad, she eventually turns on the wicked King and uses her power as "Lady of the Lake" to help defeat him for good. Though Tennyson's Vivien no longer exerts the considerable influence she once did, authors and artists continue to invoke the dualistic essence of the character that Tennyson brought into sharper focus. And it is because of Tennyson's dynamic literary and spiritual visions of Vivien that she continues to inspire stories and pictures of wickedness and divinity in the twenty-first century.

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Illustrations

Fig. 1, Julia Margaret Cameron, *Vivien and Merlin*, Photograph, 1874, In *Illustrations to Tennyson's Idylls of the King, and Other Poems*, London: Henry S. King & Co., 1875, https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/object/104G3Q.

Fig. 2, Julia Margaret Cameron, *Vivien and Merlin*, Photograph, 1874, In *Illustrations to Tennyson's Idylls of the King, and Other Poems*, London: Henry S. King & Co., 1875, https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/object/104G3R.

Fig. 3, Gustave Doré, *Vivien Encloses Merlin in the Tree*, 1867, In *Vivien*, by Alfred Tennyson, Plate 9, London: Edward Moxon and Co., 1867.

Fig. 4, Edward Burne-Jones, *Merlin and Nimue*, Watercolour, 1861, V&A Museum, London, https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O17355/merlin-and-nimue-watercolour-burne-jones-edward/.

Fig. 5, Edward Burne-Jones, *The Beguiling of Merlin*, Oil on Canvas, 1874-1877, Lady Lever Art Gallery, Liverpool, https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/the-beguiling-of-merlin-102461.

Fig. 6, Edward Burne-Jones, *Witches' Tree*, Gouache on Paper, 1882-1898, British Museum, London, https://www.bmimages.com/preview.asp?image=00214098001&itemw=4&itemf=0001&itemstep=1&itemx=34.

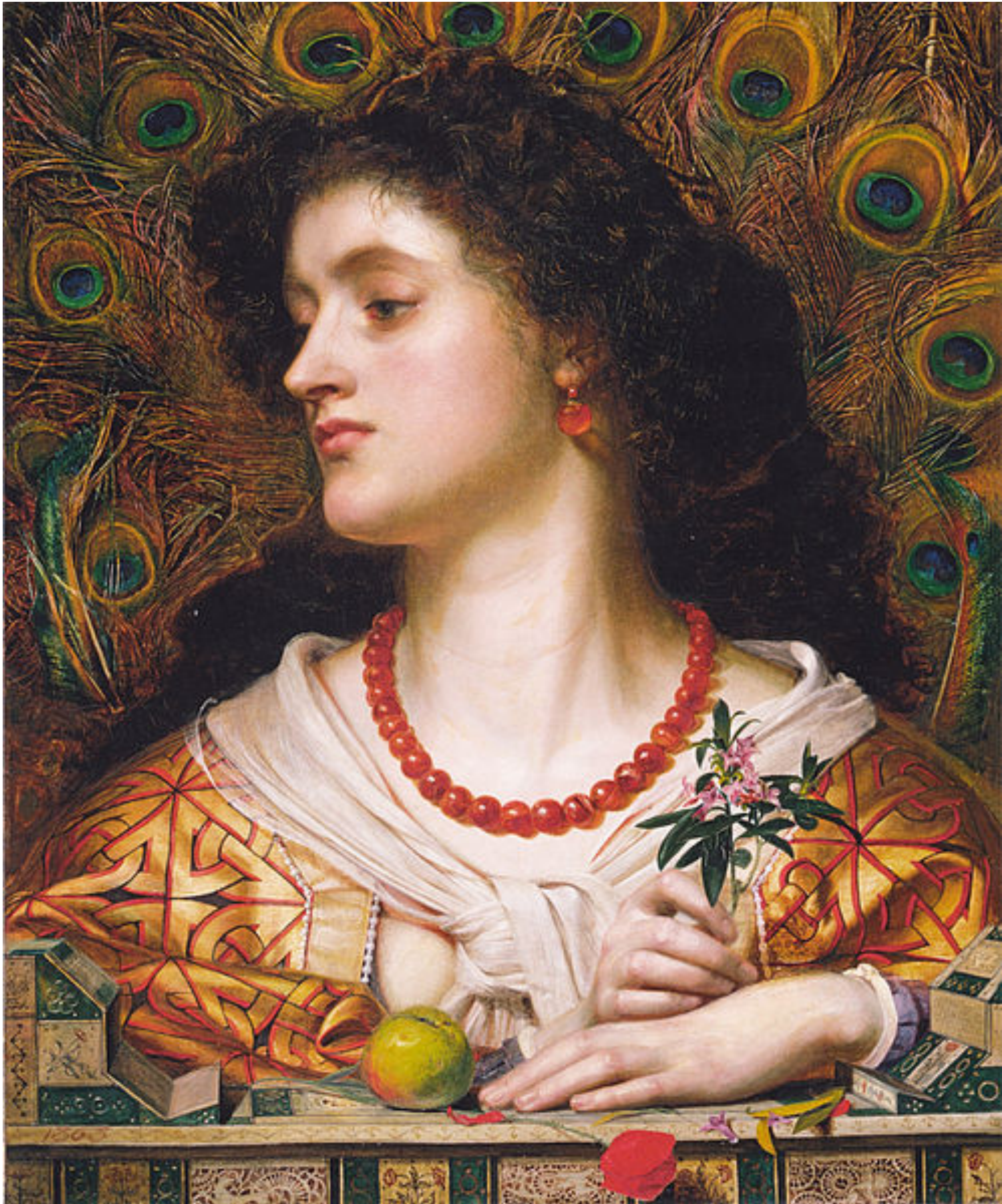


Fig. 7, Frederick Sandys, *Vivien*, Oil on Canvas, 1863, Manchester Art Gallery, Manchester, https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/vivien-205974.

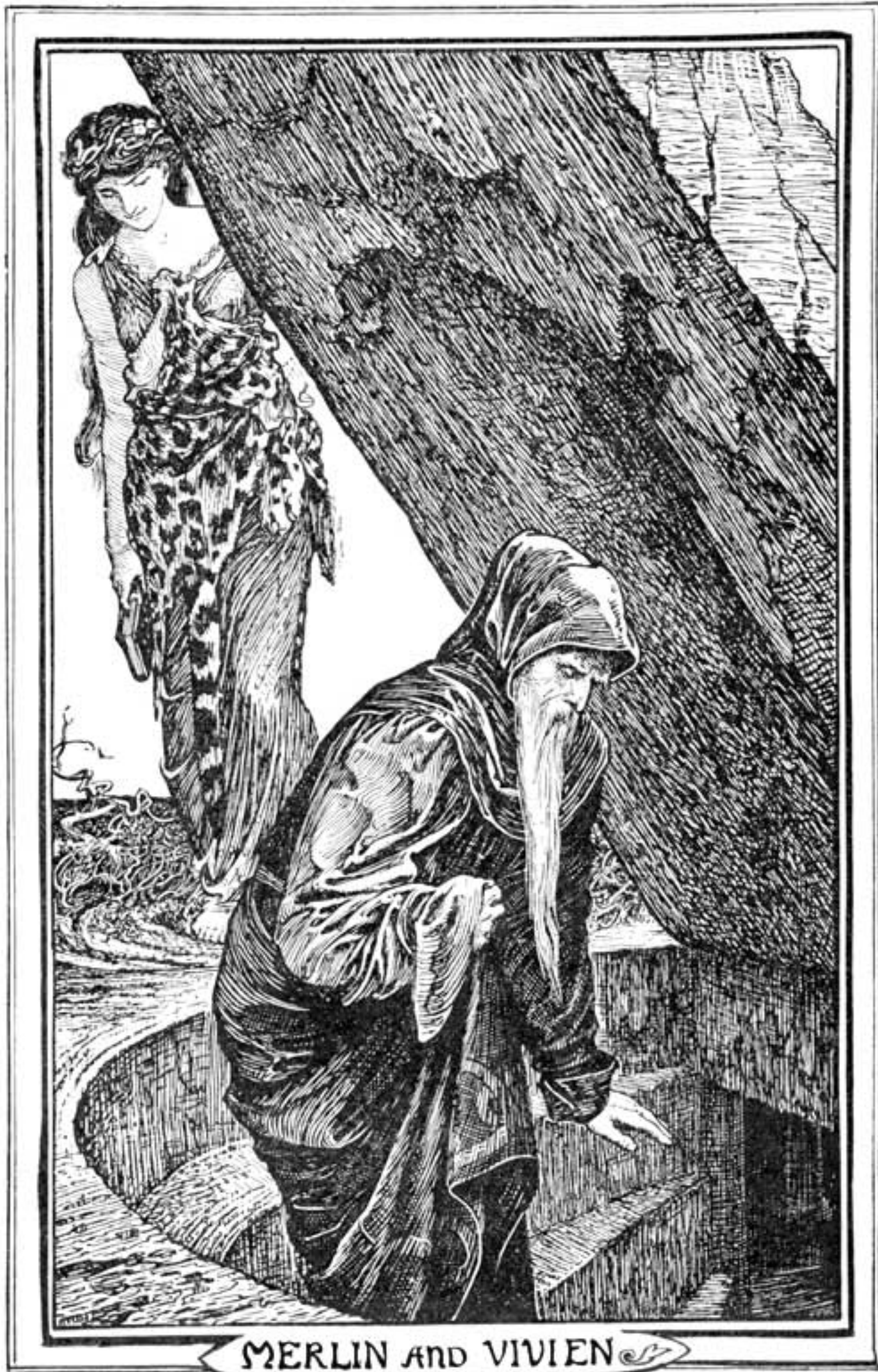
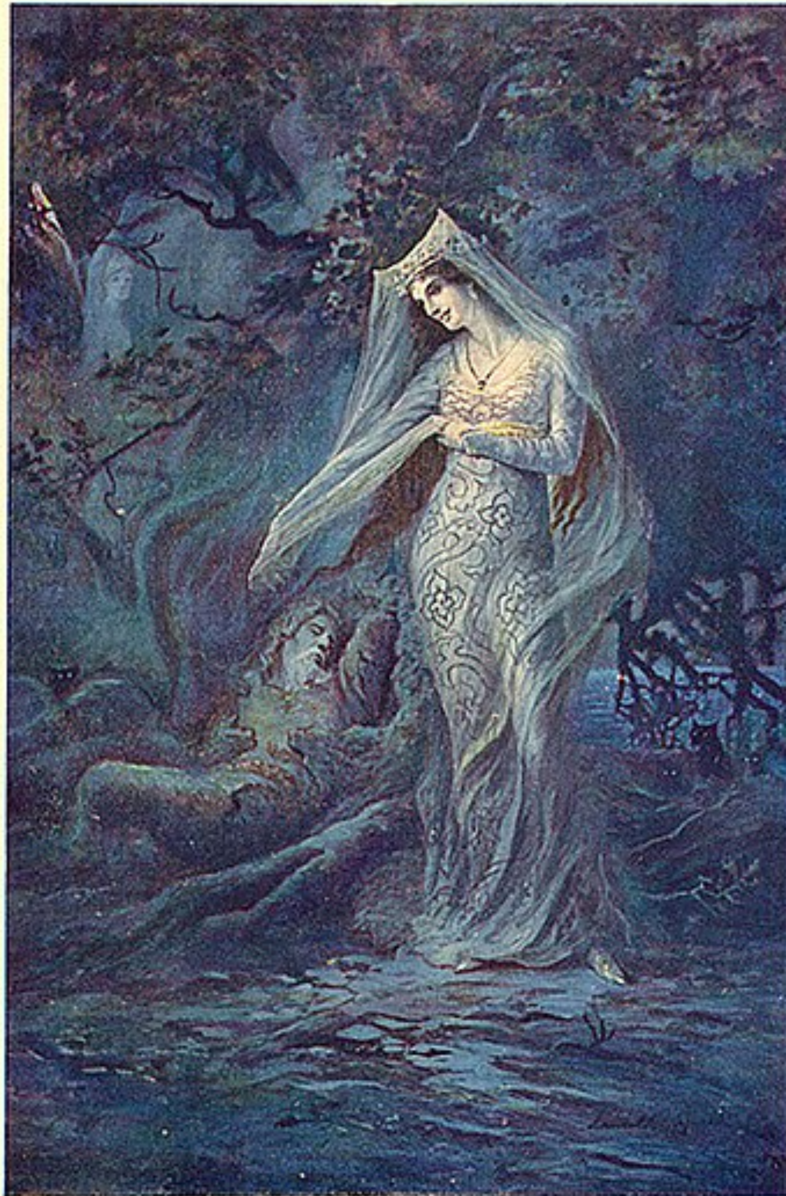


Fig. 8, H. J. Ford, *Merlin and Vivien*, 1902, In *The Book of Romance*, Edited by Andrew Lang, Plate 4, London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1902.

Fig. 9, Dora Curtis, “She caused the rock to shut down”, 1905, In *Stories of King Arthur and the Round Table*, by Beatrice Clay, Plate 8, London: J. M. Dent and Co., 1905.

Fig. 10, George Housman Thomas, *Merlin and Vivien*, 1862, In *The Story of King Arthur and His Knights of the Round Table*, by Sir James Thomas Knowles, Plate 5, London: Griffith and Farran, 1862.



Waving her hands and muttering the charm, and presently enclosed him fast within the tree.

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Fig. 11, Lancelot Speed, “Waving her hands and muttering the charm, and presently enclosed him fast within the tree”, 1912, In *The Legends of King Arthur and His Knights*, by Sir James Thomas Knowles, 9th ed., Plate 15, London: Frederick Warne and Co., 1912.

Fig. 12, Louis Rhead, *The Wily Vivien*, 1923, In *King Arthur and His Knights*, by Sir James Thomas Knowles, Plate 22, New York: Blue Ribbon Books, 1923.

Fig. 13, Howard Pyle, *The Enchantress Vivien*, 1903, In *The Story of King Arthur and His Knights*, by Howard Pyle, Plate 31, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903.

Fig. 14, Howard Pyle, *The Lady of ye Lake*, 1903, In *The Story of King Arthur and His Knights*, by Howard Pyle, Plate 26, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903.

Fig. 15, John Moyr Smith, *Vivien*, Ceramic tile, c. 1876, Author’s private collection.

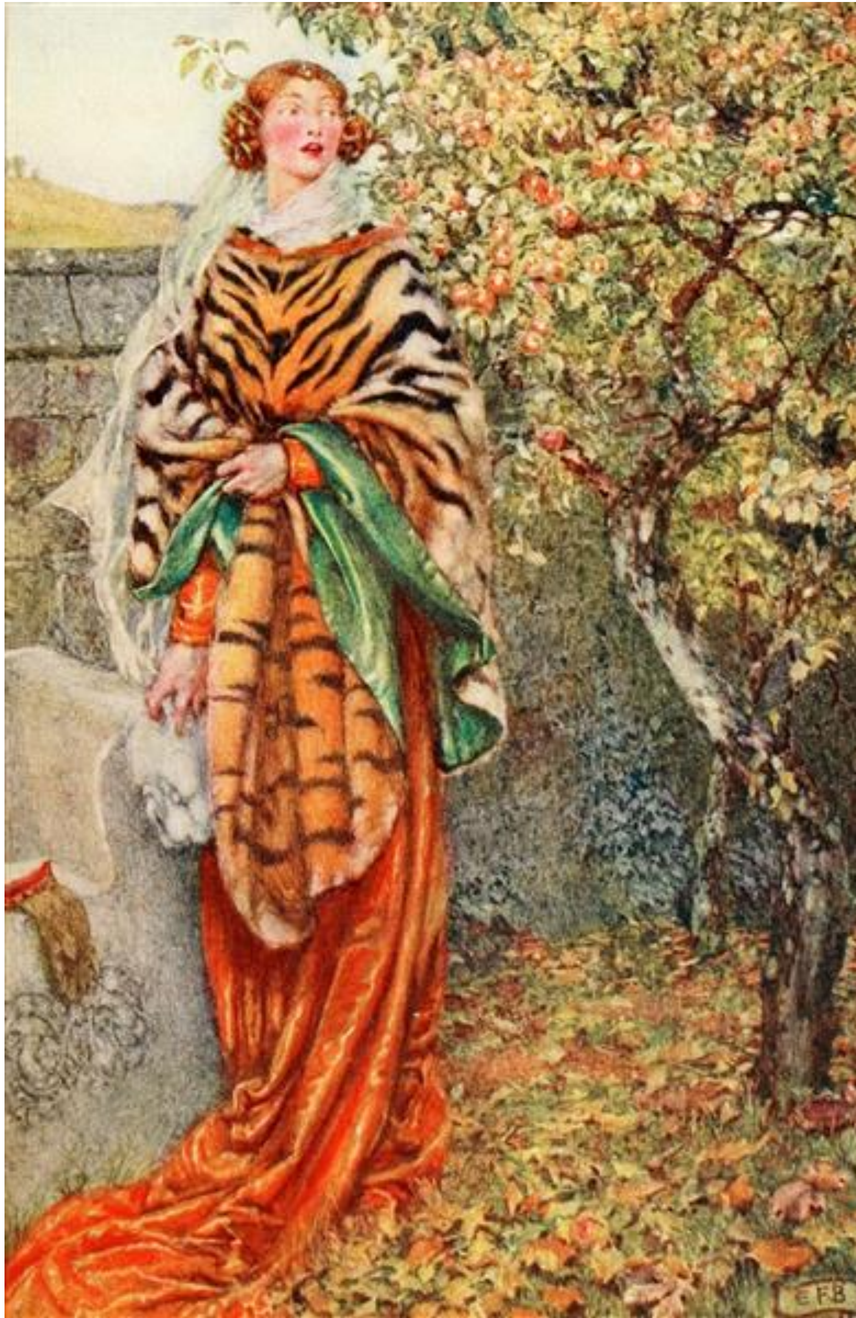

Fig. 16, Eleanor Fortescue-Brickdale, “At which the King / Had gazed upon her blankly and gone by.”, 1912, In *Idylls of the King*, by Alfred Tennyson, Plate 6, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1912.

Fig. 17, Eleanor Fortescue-Brickdale, “O master, do you love my tender rhyme?”, 1912, In *Idylls of the King*, by Alfred Tennyson, Plate 7, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1912.

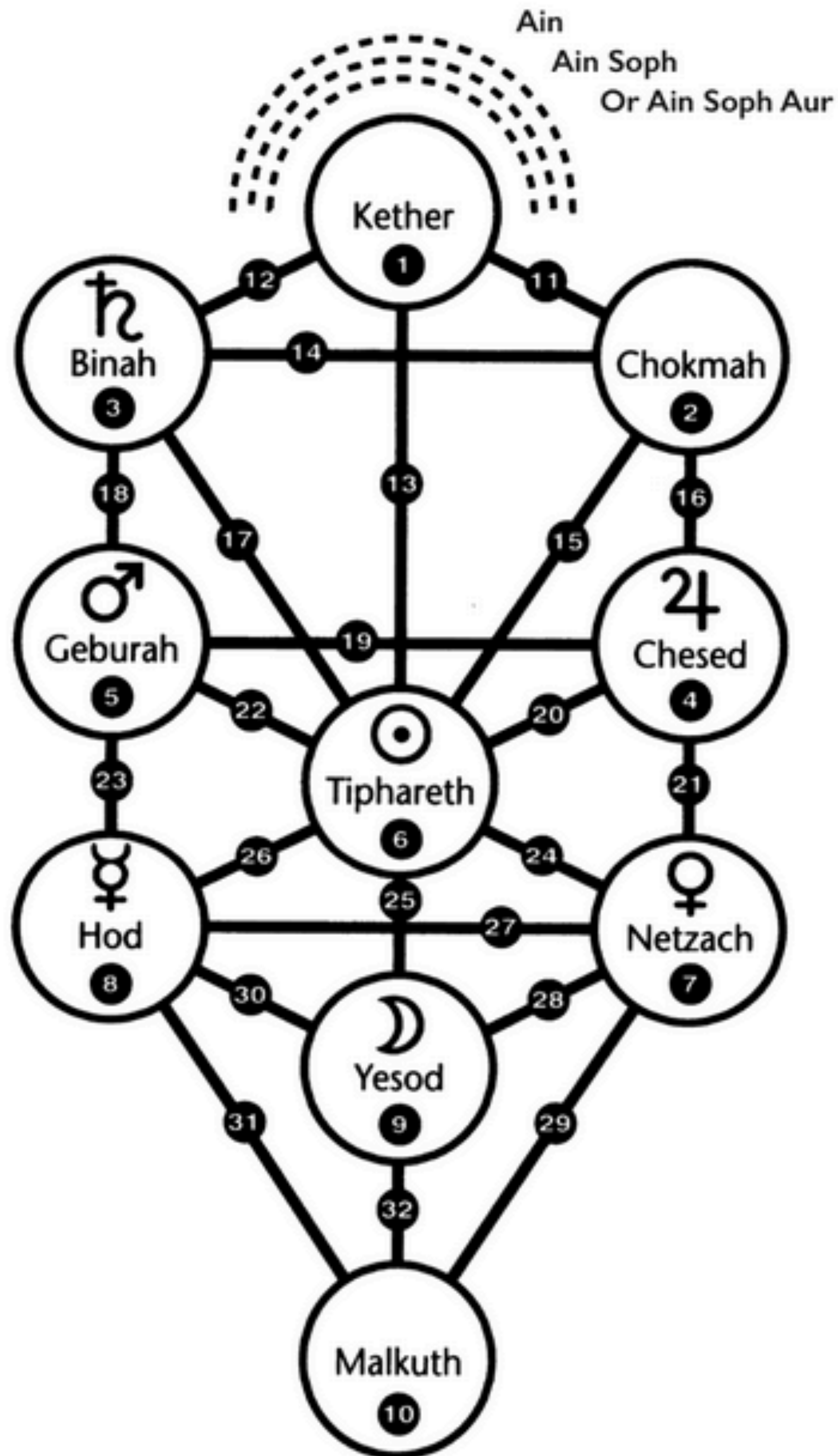

Fig. 18, *The Tree of Life and the Thirty-Two Paths: Keys to Subjective Experience*, Dion Fortune, *The Mystical Qabalah* (Newburyport: Red Wheel/Weiser, 2022), 34, diagram 1.