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*Tennyson's "Enoch Arden": A Victorian Best-Seller*

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*Enoch Arden:*

A Victorian Best-Seller

In 1864, Tennyson was famous; the 1842 *Poems* and *In Memoriam* (1850) had established his reputation with the thinking public, and *Idylls of the King* (1859) with the greater number who looked for a picturesque mediaevalism in their verse. His sovereign had named him Poet Laureate, and his countrymen accorded him the hero-worship typical of the Victorian era.

It was at this point that he published a new poem, *Enoch Arden,* which went immediately to the hearts of his readers and became a best-seller, yet which has come to be so badly regarded by modern critics that it seldom receives serious attention. The study that follows is divided into four sections. The first section shows the breadth of *Enoch Arden*’s readership; the second, based largely on unpublished material, is an attempt to provide some explanation of why Tennyson chose the subject he did, when he did; the third section is an examination of the attacks the early reviewers made on the morality of the poem, which provide a pointer to some moral subtleties in an essentially simple work; and the fourth section traces out in *Enoch Arden* various elements well known in Victorian popular narrative.

I

*The Critics and the Best-Seller*

It was small wonder that Tennyson’s forthcoming volume was eagerly awaited. It had originally been announced for the spring, and most of it had been in proof for nearly two years.¹ On July 11th, 1864, the *Times* carried a notice that the title, previously given as *Idylls of the Hearth,* had been changed to *Enoch Arden,* etc., and by the middle of the next month the book had been published. Some seventeen thousand copies were sold on the day of publication,² and before the end of the year the first impression of sixty thousand had been sold.³ As the *Times* commented:

> In these times, when satirists tell us . . . that the most unsaleable of wares is a volume of poems, the Laureate issues a little book, which, although this is for publishers the dead season of the year, goes off like a prairie on fire.⁴

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Most of the reviewers joined with the public in their praise of the volume, and of its chief poem, *Enoch Arden* itself. *Chambers Journal of Popular Literature, Science and Arts* claimed of this “exquisite Idyll”:

Obstinate indeed must be that veteran who does not bid his trumpet sound a parley, and presently open gates and lower drawbridge to *Enoch Arden* . . . no simple tale was ever so nobly told by any poet in our land.¹

George W. Curtis, writing from the “Easy Chair” of *Harper’s Magazine*, claimed: “There is no nobler tale of true love than this.”⁶ Dr. Robert Scott, in the *Quarterly Review*, stated: “No other of his poems can reach above it.”⁷ Edward Law, in the *British Controversialist*, a paper of the labour aristocracy of which I shall have more to say later, wrote: “*Enoch Arden* is as holy as an angel’s dream, and all but as palpitatingly human as one of His parables Who spake as never man spake.”⁸ An American critic, R. M. Swearingen, rhapsodized: “A story so sweetly sad, so heavenly pure, might, without desecration, undulate in rippling cadences from Seraph tongues — as they float on the wavelets of the ever shining river.”⁹ These are large claims indeed, but there is also evidence that the private feelings of by no means negligible critics were much the same as the public statements of the popular press; Browning wrote that *Enoch Arden* was “a perfect thing,”¹⁰ and Swinburne, a year later, wrote that it had been “a new triumph worth any of the old.”¹¹

There were two types of dissent from the overwhelming majority approval. A number of periodicals — among them, the *Times*, the *Athenaeum*, the *British Quarterly Review*, and the *London Quarterly Review* — queried the morality of the poem; and with their dissent I deal more fully below.¹² A much smaller number of readers attacked the poetry itself. Matthew Arnold said that *Enoch Arden* was “very good indeed”, but in a way he could not approve of.¹³ Edward Fitzgerald thought that Tennyson had “come down to very little, from great things.” ‘Barry Cornwall’ (in real life, B. W. Proctor, a solicitor) wrote to John Forster:

I am afraid we must not expect anything more from Tennyson.¹⁴

Walter Bagehot made a famous criticism of Tennyson’s “ornate” poetry in the *National Review*.¹⁵ The criticisms of the poetry itself all come from people holding clear ideas of what the Laureate ought to have been doing. Tennyson’s poetry fulfilled the unformulated wishes of the large majority of his countrymen, and these few dissentients should not be taken as representing any large body of critics. There can be no doubt that *Enoch Arden* was the first of Tennyson’s poems to make an impact on the whole of the reading public.¹⁶
It is unnecessary to deal at length here with the reaction against Tennyson, starting from Alfred Austin’s article in *Temple Bar* in 1869, and becoming shriller as the century passed away. *Enoch Arden* was used as the symbol of all that was worst in Victorian poetry, in the special meaning that ‘Victorian’ held for the early moderns. A typically elegant page from Wyndham Lewis’s “little magazine”, *Blast*, took “Chaos of Enoch Ardens” as the first line of an attack on the “Gloomy Victorian Circus.” It was one of the poems that Harold Nicolson did not try to defend in his study of 1923, and even the sympathetic G. M. Young thought that in it Tennyson became at times “vapidly pontifical, and almost embarrassingly silly,” though Young’s lecture is still the best evocation of the poem’s Victorianness.

Following this over-reaction, there has been intelligent criticism of most of Tennyson’s poems. But the critics have been wary of *Enoch Arden*, perhaps because of its enormous contemporary popularity. The well-known story of its origin as a versification of Woolner’s “Fisherman’s Story”, the idea that it was dashed off in just over a fortnight, the overt emotionalism of the climax, and the notorious final line, have all led to an attitude of polite distrust. The general tone of twentieth-century criticism of the poem is that of not-too-respectful an obituary notice. Jerome Buckley’s note in his Riverside *Poems of Tennyson* captures it well:

The often labored simplicity of the piece, and its many touches of sentimental ‘realism’ have but little appeal to the reader of today.

F. L. Lucas writes:

*Enoch Arden* conquered Germany when Germany was still sentimental. But today that worthy fisherman keeps no vitality.

J. B. Steane represents this attitude of patronage:

In its way, *Enoch Arden* still stands as a nineteenth century classic, but that is not entirely to its credit.

But Tennyson cannot be so lightly dismissed. As W. W. Robson notes, more generally, of the later works:

There is often a curious unpleasant life in the later Tennyson that compels some reaction from the reader.

If *Enoch Arden* does have a representative status, and its popularity would support the claim, it would seem useful to examine the “curious unpleasant life” that the poem holds. There have now been sympathetic studies of the poem in relation to the rest of Tennyson’s work, and to the other poems of the 1864 volume. I want here to examine its morality and technique in relation to other versions of its story, particularly to the other versions of the 1850’s and 1860’s. This examination shows in how very specialised
Tennyson's 'Enoch Arden'

a sense Tennyson became the Poet of the People, and how inadequate is Paull F. Baum's dismissal of the poem as "conceived in sentiment and brought forth in complacency."

II

The Laureate in search of a subject

That modern readers have been patronising in their attitude to Tennyson's Enoch Arden has in part been the fault of Sir Harold Nicolson. He drew, both wittily and convincingly, the picture of a joint conspiracy of Emily Tennyson, Thomas Woolner, and Edward Fitzgerald to provide Tennyson with the material to write a poem, and of Tennyson frustrating their efforts to occupy his time, by completing the versification of the Enoch Arden story in little over a fortnight. Nicolson got his effect by giving the impression that the separate events — the hearing of Woolner's story, the obtaining of a copy, the writing of the poem, the consultations with Fitzgerald — succeeded each other much more rapidly than was in fact the case. The large collection of biographical material now at the Tennyson Research Centre, Lincoln, enables a more accurate picture of the events to be built up. Tennyson made a deliberate choice of the story for Enoch Arden, and took considerable pains in its execution.

In 1859, Woolner returned from his journey to Australia, and told or retold to the Tennysons when he visited them, a story he had heard perhaps on the voyage, perhaps in his Suffolk childhood. Later that year, after the publication of the Idylls of the King, Mrs. Tennyson wrote to Woolner (November 16th, 1859): "I wish you would give Alfred something to do. He is pretty well but for want of this."

Mrs. Tennyson did much, if not most, of the family correspondence during this period, not always with the co-operation of Alfred; this request, of which Nicolson makes much, was probably nothing more than an expression of general concern for Alfred's work. Woolner, at this stage, took it fairly generally, and wrote to Mrs. Tennyson (December 5th, 1859):

I grieve to hear that the Poet is not well, and most sincerely hope that, if a subject for a poem will make him better, he will soon succeed in pleasing himself. I wish I could persuade him to do the tale of the Sailor, which I told him of years ago I should think, for I think it capable in his hands of growing into one of the greatest poems, altho' told not of princes, philosophers or chiefs. I daresay he has forgotten it..."

Obviously Woolner found the story affecting as a poem of humble life, an English genre going back to Crabbe and Wordsworth;
Tennyson's 'Enoch Arden'

Tennyson, however, was interested in the poem of modern life, and wrote at this time *Sea Dreams*, first published in *Macmillan's Magazine* in January, 1860. There is no record of him showing any particular interest in Woolner's story, at this time. It was not until two years later that he wrote to get an outline from Woolner. What had happened to direct his thoughts to this story?

The situation in *Enoch Arden* rests on a sailor returning after many years to find his wife remarried, and happily settled. The theme is an old one in European literature, and goes back at least to Homer's *Odyssey*. Tennyson would certainly have come across it there before; he could easily have read it in his father's copy of *Gil Blas*; and he knew the very close parallel to *Enoch Arden* in Crabbe's tale *The Parting Hour*. His own Lotos-Eaters had expressed the feelings in their exile that Enoch was to express on his tropical island, and Tennyson develops some lines from the earlier poem in the later one.

These are examples of the theme in "high" literature, but it was also well known in more popular writing, and oral tradition. It forms the story of a ballad composed by Lady Anne Barnard (1750-1825) in 1772, and reprinted by Sir Walter Scott for the Bannantyne Club in 1825, entitled *Auld Robin Gray*. When Tennyson went to Brittany in 1864, he was delighted to hear a Breton ballad-version of the story, *Le Chanson de Marin*. Sir Alfred Lyall refers to "a rude English sea ballad that used to be well known" as using the story, although I have been unable to identify this. The same story provides the human interest, rather than heroic action, in an extremely popular nautical melodrama of the eighteen-thirties, *My Poll and My Partner Joe*, by John Thomas Haines, which was first produced at the Surrey theatre in the Blackfriars Road on the 31st August, 1835, and subsequently ran for at least 269 performances, with Thomas Potter Cooke, the most popular sailor-actor of the time, playing the lead. It was no exaggeration for George O. Marshall to write: "the general story is common in folk-lore," and, he could well have added, in popular literature.

But in the late eighteen-fifties and early eighteen-sixties, several writers turned to this theme of popular literature, and it seems to have had some special fascination. In 1858, when Mrs. Gaskell was asked to contribute the second chapter to a "chain story" — one with each chapter written by a different novelist — under the general title *A House to Let*, she made a character tell the story of *Enoch Arden*, as "The Manchester Marriage"; this was for Dickens' Special Christmas Number of *Household Words*. Adelaide A. Procter, daughter of the critical "Barry Cornwall", had written a
very sentimental version of the story with the title “Homeward Bound”, as a verse monologue, in 1858. Subsequently this was canvassed as a source for *Enoch Arden*, but Hallam Tennyson states definitely that Tennyson did not know of the Procter poem until after the publication of his own.41 Trollope used the situation in his *Castle Richmond* (1861). In 1862, there appeared Elizabeth Braddon’s great best-seller, *Lady Audley’s Secret*, and, allowing for the vast difference of tone and development, the plot follows the basic situation of *Enoch Arden*, with Lucy Audley, married to Sir Michael, and faced with her first husband, George Talboys, unexpectedly returned from Australia and the dead.

Mrs. Gaskell used the story again in her novel, *Sylvia’s Lovers* (1863). As in Crabbe’s Tale, and in Tennyson’s, the rival suitor is called Philip. Sylvia’s first love, Kinraid, to whom she was betrothed, not married, is carried off by the press-gang; Philip knows this, but does not tell Sylvia, whom he later marries. When Kinraid returns, a hero, Philip runs away to sea, for shame. Philip returns, unrecognised, to his home years later, and sees his wife and children happy, though Sylvia had not yet remarried. The emotion generated by Philip’s nearness to his family, and his relative poverty, while he refuses to reveal himself for fear of spoiling their happiness, is the closest parallel to *Enoch Arden* (chapters XLII to XLV), and the novel ends with the erection of almshouses in memory of him.

Christopher Ricks points out that the name of Enoch Arden’s ship *Good Fortune* was taken from the earlier half of this novel — it was the name of Kinraid’s ship; if Tennyson took this ironic name from *Sylvia’s Lovers*, he must have inserted it into the completed poem at a late stage, after the poem had been set up in proof.42 It will be seen from the summary given, that Mrs. Gaskell’s treatment is more complicated, giving two successive treatments of the return motif; Tennyson’s relative simplicity of plot and characterisation show that he was arranging the story to be a poem, not a versified novelette.

The theme of the bigamous marriage continued to interest serious writers after the publication of *Enoch Arden*, because the bare facts of such a plot invited many different kinds of treatment. Zola published a version of the story, with the title *Jacques Damour*, in 1865, and Trollope gave it a second, full-length, treatment, concentrating on the moral issues following the return of the first husband, in *Dr. Wortle’s School* (1881). The number, the variety, and the popularity of these analogues shows, then, that the general situation on which *Enoch Arden* was based had become a commonplace, if a peculiarly fascinating one, for mid-Victorian writers.
Tennyson's 'Enoch Arden'

Tennyson's attention seems to have been drawn to the theme, and therefore back to the story Woolner had told him earlier, by Arthur Hugh Clough. Clough and Tennyson had known each other distantly since 1853, and more intimately since the Cloughs started taking holidays at Freshwater, near Tennyson's home at Farringford in the Isle-of-Wight, in 1856. During the summer of 1861, the Tennysons went touring down to the Pyrenees, and there met Clough, who was attempting to recuperate from the illness which, when it recurred, that November, was to kill him. Clough's poetic was, of course, in many ways markedly different from Tennyson's; his long narrative poems are based, not on a medieval or classical past, but on modern, usually upper-middle class, life.

Reviewing Arnold's 1853 volume, Clough had written:

"To be widely popular, poetry should deal more than at present it usually does, with general wants, ordinary feelings, the obvious rather than the rare facts of human nature... the modern novel is preferred to the modern poem, because we do here feel an attempt to include these positive matters of fact, which people, who are not verse-writers, are obliged to do with".

This might be a prescription for the sort of poem of the hearth that Tennyson wrote in *Enoch Arden*. But there was one poetic theme, to which Clough continually recurred, which linked his poetry of modern life with the genre poem of country love and humble life — with the poem Woolner had hoped Tennyson would write from his sailor story. There is perhaps an autobiographical element in it, for it is the story of a young Oxford don, who falls in love with a Highland girl, on a reading-party in Scotland. Clough's early treatments of the story — in *The Bothie of Toper-na-Fuosich* (1848), and "Farewell, my Highland lassie" (in *Ambarvalia*, 1849) — are a love-idyll and a love-elegy respectively. During the enforced leisure of his illness of 1861, Clough returned to the theme, but this time with a difference. The last of his ship-board tales in *Mari Magno*, "The Lawyer's Second Tale", changes the ending of the story to include a dramatic sequel. Now, just as the Oxford Fellow is ready to marry his Highland lassie, she emigrates to Australia with her guardians. Subsequently, he marries someone else, but has no children. Some twenty years later, at a party, his Highland "bride", now rich and a widow, suddenly reappears. He flees to avoid a scene, but all ends happily when he adopts his illegitimate son. The return of the lost "bride" is an obvious parallel with *Enoch Arden*, but remarkable about Clough's treatment of the story is the emphasis he lays on the moral effect on the hero of love, marriage, and honest work:

This he must do, 'twas evident, 'twas clear,  
Marry and seek a humble maintenance here...
Tennyson’s ‘Enoch Arden’

To this plain business he would bend his life,
And find his joy in children and in wife. (193-197)

This story has two companion-pieces, ‘The Lawyer’s First Tale’, about a spurned lover meeting, unexpectedly, in Switzerland, his love, only to find she is now married to someone else, and ‘The Clergyman’s Second Tale’, about a clerk, travelling on the continent after an illness, who commits adultery and feels too guilty to return to his wife, and for a year endures solitary, self-imposed exile from his home. At the beginning of this tale, the picture of married life is again reminiscent of the *Enoch Arden* marriage:

- Nine happy years had crowned their married state
- With children, one a little girl of eight;
- With nine industrious years his income grew,
- With his employers rose his favour too. (15-18).

Compare *Enoch Arden*:

- ... merrily ran the years, seven happy years,
- Seven happy years of health and competence,
- And mutual love and honourable toil;
- With children; first a daughter ... (81-84).

Tennyson’s blank verse is fluent beside Clough’s Chaucerian couplets, but both share a concern for the “obvious...facts of human nature”. Clough’s *Mari Magno* was not the source for *Enoch Arden*, but its treatment of the theme of love thwarted, of the feelings of the deprived lover, and of simple moral positives, made it peculiarly fitted to be the precipitating influence on Tennyson’s writing of the poem.

It is not surprising to find, therefore, in Tennyson’s reminiscences of the tour together in the Pyrenees in 1861: “Clough read me then his In Mari Magno and cried like a child over it.” This is confirmed by Henry Dakyns, travelling with them as tutor to the two Tennyson boys, who was told by Tennyson after the reading: “Clough’s Muse has lost none of her power.” Dakyns adds, “I could not help feeling a little hurt that I had not been asked to the reading.” It is, then, at least a reasonable assumption that Tennyson talked with Clough about the poems which made up *Mari Magno*.

But very soon after Tennyson returned from his tour, and got back to Farringford (September 28th, 1861), a letter was sent to Woolner to obtain a copy of his sailor story. This Woolner sent on November 11th, and when the Duke of Argyll called on Tennyson on November 13th, Tennyson “told him Woolner’s fisherman’s story, which broke him down a little.” As it was at this time that Tennyson wrote to the Duke (about his Laureate task of an Ode for the International Exhibition of 1862), “I hate being given a
subject," he was obviously regarding the Woolner story as his choice of subject for his next poem, not as a wife-imposed job. There was a two-year gap between Woolner's suggestion that Tennyson should use the story, and Tennyson's decision to do so.

It is worth noting that it was Tennyson's telling of the story which moved the Duke to tears, for Woolner's version appears to have been only an outline. Basing their comments on the text of "The Fisherman's Story" printed by Amy Woolner, some critics have reduced Tennyson's part in the arrangement of the narrative. George O. Marshall writes: "Tennyson's version was amazingly faithful to its original. Woolner supplied nearly every detail." Thomas Donohoe writes: "Tennyson's text shows that he followed the details [of Woolner's story] with care." But, while Christopher Ricks notes verbal echoes of the text printed by Amy Woolner in four places in the poem, he also notes many marked differences between the two versions. Hallam Tennyson referred to the prose versions of *Enoch Arden* and *Aylmer's Field* as "very slight sketches . . . which my father considerably enlarged and altered." Tennyson was not slavishly following somebody else's outline.

Having chosen the subject, Tennyson wrote very carefully. The composition of the poem occupied him for most of three months, followed by a long period of revision. There is, indeed, a family tradition, retailed by Hallam Tennyson, that the poem was written in "only about a fortnight", but the contemporary evidence does not support this, and the two-week period probably can be taken to refer to the time (February 23rd, 1862 — March 9th) during which Tennyson was engaged in putting the poem on paper. Tennyson's method of writing was to plan the exact wording of long passages in his head, and then write them down; so much so, that Mrs. Tennyson occasionally got scared that gems from the Laureate would get lost, as he would forget them before recording them. He had received the outline of the story on November 11th, 1861. He was away in London for a week, November 15th — 23rd, but by December 5th, Mrs. Tennyson could write to Woolner: "Yes, he has done a little of the Fisherman," and on December 11th she recorded in her diary: "A. reads me what he has done of Enoch Arden." (This is the first mention of the name). During the latter part of December, Tennyson was working on the "Dedication" of the second printing of the *Idylls* to the Prince Consort, who had just died, and on the Exhibition Ode, which was completed by January 9th, 1862. On January 16th, Woolner came down to stay at Farringford. On February 1st, Mrs. Tennyson again recorded, "A. reads us what he has done of Enoch Arden". Some time in February, Tennyson wrote to the Duke of Argyll, "I am now about my
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The Old Summer-house, Farringford — from B. G. Ambler: *Alfred Lord Tennyson, His Homes and Haunts.*
Fisherman,"56 and on February 23rd, Emily Tennyson wrote in her diary: "A... begins writing it down regularly today." On March 2nd, she wrote: "A. reads 'the Parting Hour' to us"; this poem of Crabbe's was an influence on the early part of *Enoch Arden*, so perhaps Tennyson was still making changes in the structure of the poem. Eventually, on March 9th, Tennyson read out loud the finished poem. It was not until the summer that Fitzgerald was consulted about the training Enoch would need to be given to get a job as ship's boatswain,57 and Tennyson was still making minor alterations up to the publication two years later.58 Much of the original composition of the poem was done in the old summerhouse at Farringford.

A detailed study of the writing of *Enoch Arden* shows that, by telescoping events, Nicolson gave a false picture of the poem. Tennyson chose the subject deliberately, himself, and chose one particular version at a time when the general story was current in many forms. He wrote his poem, and polished its style, with considerable care, and in no special hurry. He had chosen, also, the version which showed the returning seafarer as most heroic and self-sacrificing. We must now consider why Tennyson felt that this story, from humble life, had depth enough for treatment in heroic verse, as "serious" poetry.

III

The Strange Question of Unknown Guilt

Moral duty was for all articulate Victorians peremptory and absolute, and so moral judgement was an earnest necessity. Victorians differed, sometimes about how certainly a moral judgement could be made, but more often about the basis of the judgement. The Utilitarian school based their judgement on the consequences of the action, on the ultimate resultant balance of pleasure and pain. The (largely Christian) Kantian school judged by the intention of the person doing the act, by whether he meant the action for good or ill. Earnest men appealed to the sovereign right of the conscience, to an inner impulsive judgement, and most people considered the Biblical commandments to have absolute authority, whether interpreted by the individual, or by the Church, or as in Whewell's theory, mediated through the general consensus of community feeling. In normal circumstances, the moral judgements implicit in the idea of respectability worked well, but in the "hard cases", where different bases for moral judgement gave differing results, conflicts arose which are not to be lightly dismissed, as battles between obscurantism and progress. For there was a high level of
awareness of the unstable bases of moral judgement in the Victorian era. The famous Newman-Kingsley clash of 1864 rested on whether “truth is, for its own sake, a virtue,” and when Gladstone attacked Disraeli’s Conservatism in the Mid-Lothian campaign in 1879, he could say, with some hope of being understood, “Whatever may be its motive, it is in its result disloyal, it is in its essence subversive.” The only way to cut through the problem was to confront a moral theorist with an actual case, when condemnation was felt to be impossible. Thus novels were harsh about adultery but sympathetic to the “fallen woman”. Revealingly, John Bright’s defence of the Deceased Wife’s Sister’s Marriage Enablement Bill in the House of Commons (April 21st, 1869) rose to the following climax:

> Was there any man that regarded a woman married to her deceased sister’s husband as an immoral person ... likely to taint the society of his wife and daughters? ("No") And if there were children of these marriages, there was no man in that House or out of it cruel enough to point to those children by the odious name of Bastard. (Cheers).

Tennyson was one with his age in realising that the *Enoch Arden* story raised moral difficulties — should Annie remarry, should Enoch keep silent? — but was also one with it in believing that eventually an emotional compassion provided a satisfactory answer.

The actual ideas expressed by a substantial minority of critics in attacks on the morality of *Enoch Arden* should not, therefore, surprise us. Their dislike of the poem was intensified, as Tennyson intended the tragedy to be heightened, by an idealised view of marriage. One of them went so far as to imply that remarriage was sinful, as a denial of the marriage-ideal, begun in the home and continued in heaven. Adelaide Procter’s poem, punning on the title “Homeward Bound”, lets the hero hope to meet his wife, thirty years after he leaves her, in heaven: no hint is given of what has happened to her second husband.

> Over the great restless ocean
> Six-and-twenty years I roam;
> All my comrades, old and weary,
> Have gone back to die at home —
> Home! yes, I shall reach a haven,
> I, too, shall reach home and rest;
> I shall find her waiting for me
> With her baby on her breast.

Miss Procter doesn’t seem to realise that her sentimental ending raised difficulties in a critical mind, far more than does Tennyson’s “sacrifice” ending. Another correspondent in the *British Controversialist* was not far wrong in referring to this idealised home-heaven view of marriage as “a sentimental, fictitious, unnatural scheme of morality, which in its transcendentalism binds the free spirit in
Tennyson's 'Enoch Arden'

the close and ungraceful wrappings of conventional affectation."

But, though Tennyson avoids the difficulties raised by the ideal, this strength of feeling for the monogamous marriage ideal obviously heightens the sense of tragedy.

Tennyson altogether avoids the problem of whether Annie was right to re-marry. On nearly every available basis for moral judgement, she chooses rightly in agreeing to marry Philip. Legally she was in the wrong, but she remarries with the right intention, for the sake of the children (ll. 408 — 410). She delays long after the common consensus morality demanded — the common period before assumption of death was seven years, she delayed eleven. She had what she believed to be a direct revelation from the Bible that Enoch was dead (ll. 486 — 506). Finally, in the opinion of Enoch's death, she was "supported by the unanimous public opinion of the only community she knew or to whom she was known" — the "lazy gossips of the port" were all expecting the marriage (ll. 469 — 478), and her son and daughter pressed the marriage on her (ll. 479 — 485). After the first child is born from the remarriage, we are told

Then the new mother came about her heart,  
Then her good Philip was her all-in-all. (520-521).

Tennyson avoids all suggestion that her action was wrong. The morality of the remarriage is only considered as a contributing element in the tragedy of Enoch Arden himself. Mrs. Gaskell lays the same emphasis in "The Manchester Marriage", where the wife knows nothing of her first husband's survival until after his death, and possibly not even then — only a hint is given of a well-cared-for grave.

Tennyson intended the moral problems of Enoch Arden to centre on Enoch himself. Enoch leaves his wife, having been the victim of impersonal economic forces,

Ten miles to northward of the narrow port  
Opened a larger haven: (102-3).  
Another hand crept too across his trade (110).

He hopes eventually to better the position of his family by his sea-voyages:

returning rich,

Become the master of a larger craft,
With fuller profits lead an easier life,
Have all his pretty young ones educated,
And pass his days in peace among his own. (143-7).

The real moral centre of the story is Enoch's decision not to break up Annie's second marriage by revealing his return, until it is too late to make any difference. In this he seems unusual among
heroes of Victorian versions of the story. Mrs. Gaskell's Philip Hepburn (in *Sylvia's Lovers*) is the only exact parallel, and for him the hidden exile from his wife is self-imposed penance — Sylvia has not remarried; Kinraid, in the same novel, feels no need to hide his return from Sylvia, though he was only betrothed to her, not married. Frank Wilson, in Mrs. Gaskell's *Manchester Marriage* is another hero who is similar to Enoch in his refusal to reveal himself to his remarried wife, but he commits suicide rather than enduring a noble exile; in this story, in any case, the problem is centred on the attitude of the second husband, Mr. Openshaw. Most Victorian heroes return openly. Miss Procter's hero, in "Homeward Bound", rushes into the new home for a last wringing of hands before setting off on a further twenty-six years roaming. Crabbe's Allen and Judith, in *The Parting Hour*, live together at the end of the poem, prevented from marriage (they had only been engaged) by a wife he has left in Spanish America. Lady Anne Barnard's Jamie, in *Auld Robin Gray*, rushes in on the heroine Jenny, now married to Robin Gray, only to be turned out to wander. J. T. Haine's Harry Halyard (in *My Poll and My Partner Joe*), Thomas Southerne's Biron (in *The Fatal Marriage*), Henry Leslie's Silas, and Elizabeth
Braddon's George Talboys (in Lady Audley's Secret) share a common lack of scruple about breaking up their wife's second marriage.\textsuperscript{68} It was Enoch's self-sacrifice, for the happiness of his wife and children, which were to justify treating him in poetry as a strong, heroic soul.

The pathos of his self-imposed exile from marriage is strengthened by the parallel between that and his earlier exile on the island, rendered explicit in his death-bed cry of "A sail, a sail!" (1. 907). It also gains considerably from its localisation, as Enoch Arden looks through the window at the happy circle round the hearth. Valerie Pitt comments that this "bears all the marks of a contemporary set-piece,"\textsuperscript{69} and of course it was one. Philip Hepburn, in Sylvia's Lovers, "stood in the cold shadow, and looked upon the home that should have been his haven, the wife that should have welcomed him, the child that should have been his comfort" (Chapter XLII). Nathaniel Hawthorne, in his short story Wakefield, shows his hero "separating himself from his family for many years, yet stealing to the windows in the darkness to see the changes time has wrought in his familiar circle."\textsuperscript{70} There are instances of this voyeurism of the hearth in many of the Enoch Arden analogues. The scene symbolises the more general situation of Enoch, an exile from his own hearth until the day of his death.

Most contemporary readers seem to have been content to read the poem as Tennyson wrote it, as the tale of a "strong heroic soul." The conservative Quarterly Review stated:

\begin{quote}
all the poem has its very being in self-forgetfulness  
and tender purity of hope and will . . . Mr. Tennyson  
[has never uttered] one single line which an English  
mother once would wish unwritten, or an English girl  
would wish unread.\textsuperscript{71}
\end{quote}

The High Church newspaper, the Guardian, wrote, more reservedly:

\begin{quote}
The heart-broken sailor is so simple, so earnest,  
so forgiving, that . . . we are willing to follow  
as mourners at his costly funeral, while reserving  
the point of law.\textsuperscript{72}
\end{quote}

Certainly Tennyson was not outraging the common morality of Victorian England with his poem. In matters of moral judgement, as the British Quarterly Review somewhat unkindly suggested, "he [represented] a noble constituency, but he [was] their delegate rather than their leader."\textsuperscript{73}

But the outburst of condemnation, from, among other periodicals, the Times, and the Athenaeum, must have some explanation. G. M.
Young, in a characteristic passage, suggested:

It may be admitted that bigamy is rarer in the upper than in the lower walks of society... in the back of the critic's mind was the notion that by taking Annie to himself, without proof of Enoch's death, Philip was descending from the station of a thoroughly respectable man.74

Granted that condemnation of sexual mores can often be allied to class fear; in Enoch Arden, and in all the analogues, the emphasis is on the gain of respectability for the heroine in the second marriage. Enoch is a fisherman, Philip owns the mill. Young has here, I think, missed the mark. The tone of the attacks is more violent than his even prose suggests. "Enoch Arden is the story of a woman who commits bigamy without knowing it," stated the Times. "Why all this prostitution of art?" asked the Athenaeum: "Even when it is an accident, bigamy is an offence."75 Such reviewers thought that, had the poem been truly moral, Enoch would have reclaimed Annie for his wife, and put an end to her bigamous marriage. Since the reviews were in respectable journals, many readers took note of them. The Archdeacon of Suffolk wrote to Tennyson:

I had told my children that I should not read [Enoch Arden] — for, having read a very unfair criticism of it, I had been set against it — asking myself should not this man, whose words will be read by countless myriads in Australia, in America, in the south of Africa, for many centuries, be very careful what he writes so that he may help forward purity and charity and truth.76

(Needless to say, the Archdeacon did read the poem, and found that the countless myriads in the colonies were in no danger of being corrupted; he wrote to tell Tennyson that it had taught him "several lessons").

The explanation of the attacks can be found by a sort of local history of time. Opinions change in importance from year to year as well as from place to place. The reviewers who were attacking the poem were all connecting it with the recent genesis of the Sensation Novel. Dean Mansel, in the Quarterly Review, had noted only the year before, that:

Of particular offences, undoubtedly the first place must be given to bigamy... it is amazing how many of our modern writers have selected this interesting breach of morality and law as a peg on which to hang a mystery and a denouement.77

Eight of the twenty novels he was reviewing came in his subdivision of Bigamy novels — among them, Miss Braddon's Lady Audley's Secret, which went through eight editions in its year of publication,78 and the similarity of whose plot to Enoch Arden has already been noted. The realisation of a mass of non-respectable literature, where crime was, in practice, alluring, came as a shock to the upper middle class. Mansel makes the point that the sensa-
tion novel was only the tip of an iceberg, whose submerged portion was the cheap working-class fiction. The more extravagant attacks on the morality of Enoch Arden see it as part of this new sensation literature. The Wesleyan *London Quarterly Review* wrote:

It is a pity that the poet has left [Philip and Annie] committed to that form of bigamy of which Miss Braddon’s heroines are so fond, but here rendered more mischievous by the actors being portrayed as innocent, and protected by the silver shield of a great poet.\(^7^9\)

The *British Quarterly Review* makes a similar point:

In *Enoch Arden* we find with regret the violent situations which our new school of fiction delights in, and at the same time a morbid anatomy of motive.\(^8^0\)

The *Athenæum* asks, somewhat superfluously: “Are the poets and novelists bent on preparing a way for the introduction of polyandry?” and sums up its case:

[*Enoch Arden*] is one of the mysteries of a morbid epoch . . . in which it is possible for a man of fine sense and lofty genius to select bigamy as a subject for poetical art.\(^8^1\)

The public had become aware of the new “morbid epoch” in fiction in 1862-63. It was still a fresh fear in the minds of respectable reviewers, though it might now seem harmless. The attack on the poem sprang from the timing of its publication.

What is impressive about those reviews which consider the morality of the poem’s action — either in attack or defence — is the high level of articulateness in what is, after all, a problem case for the moral philosopher; the correspondence in the *British Controversialist*, a monthly publication, “apparently aimed at the serious and intelligent sections of the artisan and lower middle classes,” ran for four issues of quite searching debate, and show how a part of Tennyson’s new readership looked at poetry.\(^8^2\) Another periodical for a similar readership, the *Illustrated Times*, shows similar intelligence in answering the *Athenæum’s* attack:

If the question is put, Was Annie the wife of Enoch on his return in the same sense as that in which she was when he went away? The answer is, No.\(^8^3\)

Their eventual answer rested, as did John Bright’s about the Deceased Wife’s Sister’s Marriage Enablement Bill, on an intuitional compassion (if you like, sentimentalism), but they were aware in reading, as Tennyson was aware in writing, of the moral issues of the age.\(^8^4\) The strange question of unknown guilt is a real question in the poem, and, though the answer is only seen in Enoch’s sacrifice, gives some depth to Tennyson’s epitaph on him as a “strong, heroic, soul.”
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IV

How Tennyson told the tale

Only three of the mid-Victorian analogues of Enoch Arden make much use of the special possibilities of their medium; Mrs. Gaskell’s two versions explore character and social context, as the novel-form specially allowed her to do, and, in Clough’s “The Lawyer’s Second Tale,” the Chaucerian couplets set a matter-of-fact tone which contrasts with the gentle emotions portrayed. Other versions, whether ballad, verse-monologue, novel, melodrama, or narrative-poem, seem to share the same narrative-techniques. Part, at least, of the enormous popularity of Enoch Arden must stem from Tennyson’s readiness to tell the tale using popular methods.

Hallam Tennyson notes Tennyson’s penchant for the popular novel; Miss Braddon, Mrs. Oliphant, Rhoda Broughton, Ouida — these were among his reading. What has not generally been noted, possibly because of the almost Shakespearean claims made by Irving for the verse-plays, is Tennyson’s interest in popular theatrical entertainment. The interest had started early. G. Moore notes that there was a substantial collection of plays in Tennyson’s father’s library, and gives a suggestion of Sir Charles Tennyson’s that “one of the main hobbies of the Tennyson children was play-acting.” During Tennyson’s youth there was an active circuit of theatres in Lincolnshire, including one in Louth, where he was at school from 1817 to 1821, though there is no direct evidence of his going to a play. He would also have known the Barnwell theatre in Cambridge, from 1828 to 1831. All these were theatres in the popular tradition, and as his sons began to grow up, Tennyson took them to the theatre, on occasional visits to London. Emily Tennyson notes in her diary (August 11th, 1860): “We go to the Alhambra,” and a little later, “A. takes Hallam to the Panorama of Venice.” Evidently Tennyson had no objection to popular narrative in melodrama and novel, and it is not surprising, therefore, to find that critics have used genre comparisons to evaluate Enoch Arden; R. H. Hutton, called the poem “a versified novelette,” Dr. Japikse calls it a drama, and the subject was suggested to Puccini for a new opera. The explanation would seem to be that the mid-Victorians had some common narrative methods, irrespective of genre.

Enoch Arden represents this common narrative tradition in three main ways. First, in being built around a series of dramatic set-pieces; secondly, in a shared corpus of generalised moral sentiments; and, thirdly, in the frequent use of dramatic irony, in anticipation of later events — it seems to be assumed that the end of the story is
known from the beginning. The set-piece was in any case part of Tennyson’s poetic method. T. S. Eliot notes that Tennyson’s poems “are always descriptive, and always picturesque; they are never really narrative,” and the Times reviewer of Enoch Arden claimed that the “bard is wedded to the short episode” and that “the life described is still life.” Certainly, there is a memorable series of set-pieces in Enoch Arden. The bare scene-setting of the first nine lines; the nutting-scene, where Philip, unseen by the others, realised that Enoch would marry Annie, and “groan’d”; the leave-taking, when, after the tension of farewells, Enoch “hastily caught his bundle, waved his hand, and went his way” (ll. 236—7); Enoch Arden looking in at the window of Philip’s house, where he “stagger’d, and shook, holding the branch, and fear’d to send abroad a shrill and terrible cry” (ll. 763—4); Enoch’s death-bed, when he rose up and cried “A sail, a sail!” (l. 907) — all these show an eye for the tableau; and the gestures Tennyson ascribes to the characters who are under great stress are allied to histrionic technique as much as to real life.

By 1861, also, Tennyson had an additional pressure towards the construction of his story by key-scenes, in the great success of the illustrated edition of the Idylls; he may have kept in mind while planning the poem that his text should be able to be meaningfully illustrated. There were at least five different illustrated editions of Enoch Arden, all of which made use of Tennyson’s liking for tableau-situations. One of them, published by Moxon with illustrations by Arthur Hughes and thus in a sense the “official” version, uses similar compositions to bring out the parallelism of incident in Tennyson’s poem; Philip, after he has seen Enoch and Annie together in the wood, and Enoch, after he sees Philip and Annie together in their home, are both shown prostrate with shock. The illustrations in the text of this essay are examples of the way these set-pieces each summarise one stage in the development of the story.

Secondly, Enoch Arden makes use of generalised moral sentiments, of the type which in melodrama could count on the (vociferous) agreement of the pit or gallery, and in poetry with the silent approval of the family circle or schoolroom audience. This is partly due to the frequent use of Biblical quotation, at a time when the Authorised Version was the common heritage of all classes. There are at least eighteen explicit quotations, and many slight allusions. Tennyson does not use the Biblical quotations to evoke an especially religious, or other-worldly, value-system in the poem, but to establish the culture within which Enoch himself thought, and to portray Enoch as a man who took his responsibilities in this life seriously. Because the Bible forms part of Enoch’s culture rather than his
belief, a Pickwickian Christianity to be tested by more than Pickwickian difficulties, there is no friction with the main moral positive of Victorian popular narrative, and of Tennyson’s poem, the value of the hearth; devotion in love and the drive towards social respectability are linked with the idea of preserving a home. G. M. Young has pointed out the theme which would strike a young couple sitting holding hands in the back of the schoolroom while the vicar reads *Enoch Arden* aloud. They would notice especially that when Enoch began to love Annie, he began to work harder, to want to get on. Emily Tennyson had recorded in her diary in 1860: “A. read me some of Smiles’s *Self-help* and we resolve to get it for the boys.”

Enoch set

    a purpose evermore before his eyes,
    To hoard all savings to the uttermost,
    To purchase his own boat, and make a home
    For Annie. (11. 44-48).

He purchased his boat, and made the home, “neat and nest-like,” and married. Marriage brought to him “seven happy years of health and competence.” When children were born, paternal affection also took the form of financial provision:

    In him woke
    With his first babe’s first cry, the noble wish
    To save all earnings to the uttermost,
    And give his child a better bringing-up
    Than his had been, or hers; (11. 84-88).

His worst fear, when he lost his trade, was that his children would never be able to better themselves:

    He seem’d, as in some nightmare of the night,
    To see his children leading evermore
    Low miserable lives of hand-to-mouth,
    And her he loved a beggar. (11. 114-117).

Enoch makes his voyage in the search for respectability, and respectability goes on as a major theme of the poem. When Enoch seemed lost, Philip provided the “wherewithal” to put the boy and girl to school, in the home after the remarriage there was obviously a competence — it is part of Enoch’s second exile to be poor as well as excluded — and the respectability theme is finally fulfilled in the funeral with which the poem closes; it was costly in money to Philip and Annie, and Enoch’s sacrifice itself was costly to him — money and devotion are linked to the last line. For the display of strong emotions, Victorian narrative needed explicit, strong, and simple moral values; the morality of the hearth provides a single, secular motivation for the story, coloured, rather than supported, by religion. The cancelled title of the *Enoch Arden* volume was “Idylls of the Hearth.”
The third narrative-element which Tennyson's poem shares with other genres is the constant use of blatant dramatic ironies, which, in *Enoch Arden*, are of incident as well as of language, and which give coherence to an otherwise loose plot.99 These ironies are often strongest at the points where Tennyson has made most change to Woolner's outline. Woolner did not, for instance, include, in his version the first childhood scene, where the play of the three children prefigures the main plot; the three played house in the cave on the shore, and Enoch and Philip were husband "turn and turn about"; sometimes they clashed, and Annie said, "she would be little wife to both." The leave-taking scene is studded with dramatic ironies;
Enoch's cheerful warning, "I'll be back, my girl, before you know it," is nicely counterpoised by Annie's sad musing, "Well know I that I shall look upon your face no more," and is developed by the laughing distinction Enoch makes: "Well, then," said Enoch, "I shall look on yours."

When Enoch has been away some years, he comes to mean very little to his children — "he seem'd to them uncertain as a vision or a dream". This simile introduces the part of the plot which modern readers find most difficult to take seriously — when Annie is looking for guidance about whether Enoch is alive. The ironic misinterpretation of dreams is a common-place in melodrama, and Annie's vision is an ironic anticipation. In desperation, she decides to try the sortes, and seizes the Bible, to find her finger on the text, "Under the palm-tree." Going back to sleep again, she dreams she sees Enoch sitting in the sun beneath a palm-tree, assumes he is in heaven, with the Sun of Righteousness shining on him, and marries Philip. But the vision was all too literally true, for Enoch is really ship-wrecked on a desert-island, although the realisation of the dream is softened by the statement that on his island Enoch, "set in this Eden of all plenteousness, dwelt with eternal summer." He hears the bells of his parish church, as Annie and Philip are married, and his rescue from his island solitude is eventually paralleled by his death-bed, where death seems to him a rescuing sail.

These common narrative techniques, used by Tennyson in *Enoch Arden* with greater skill and subtlety than was usual, seem to be what gave the poem both its popularity and its power. The set-piece situations are filled with emotion, like stills of the important moments in a film; the simple, strong moral positives are not banal when seen, as in this story, under pressure from a complicated moral problem; and the continuing pleasure of re-reading the poem comes, not so much from feeling the depth of pathos in the story, but from realising the layer upon layer of irony behind what appears on first reading to be happiness, certainty, or security.

Though *Enoch Arden* succeeds through using narrative methods common to many different Victorian narrative forms, it did not translate well into another medium. The story had been reconstructed by Tennyson for poetry; the cross-cutting, for instance, from Annie's remarriage to Enoch's shipwreck, after years of which the marriage bells must ring in his ears, could not be well reproduced on stage, though several popular stage adaptations were made in the years following its publication. The great advantage of poetry for Tennyson's narrative, though, is the steady beat of the
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pentameter line, which gives a norm of pace and feeling against which Tennyson can adjust the acting and talking of his characters, now chiming us through seven happy years in a few lines, and now lingering on the impersonal description of Enoch’s tropical island for thirty, detailed, lines of loneliness. This variation of pace, where events can pass both faster and slower than in real life, and can gain from such slowness emotional depth, was possible only in narrative poetry, until the advent of film. It was the continuing popularity of Enoch Arden with a respectable, if rather uncritical, readership, that led to the making of several film versions of the poem; but it is an interesting sidelight on Tennyson’s narrative methods that it was in filming Enoch Arden that new techniques, involving changes of pace and focus, were developed in the cinema, to replace techniques borrowed from the stage. Tennyson’s Enoch Arden, though popular, was not just meretriciously poetical, but was the creation of an artist in the telling of a tale.

V

Nature brings not back the Mastodon . . .
Perhaps some modern touches here or there
Redeemed it from the charge of nothingness,
Or else we loved the man, and prized his work.

Tennyson, The Epic.

It is hard to imagine now that in 1864 the Poet Laureate could publish a poem attracting enthusiasm from all sections of the reading public, and still keep the respect of intellectuals like Gladstone, Browning and Swinburne. It is hard in reading Enoch Arden to imagine that a Victorian poet could feel alienated from his readers, when Tennyson was so obviously at one with his. Contemporary comment on the poem gives some explanation of why, at that time, with that subject, and using those methods, Tennyson’s poem went off “like a prairie on fire.” It is worth looking seriously at such forgotten poems, apparently sunk without trace. As Hoggart says of a descendant group of popular narratives:

There is no virtue in merely laughing at them: we need to appreciate first that they may in all their triteness speak for a solid . . . way of life.

Any claims for Enoch Arden as literature should not now be disproportionate; technically it is as good as any of Tennyson’s blank verse, and the construction brings out to the full the meaning of Enoch’s sacrifice, and the helplessness of the actors in the story, but it is a story that depends very much on the values of its age, and it has not worn well. The historian of literature or society,
though, must recognize how completely the poem fulfilled the demands of Tennyson’s public. Woolner wrote, rather cynically, to Mrs. Tennyson, on receiving a presentation copy of the poem:

\[
\text{... the Bard has a decided respect for public opinion ... I think the next volume he does ought not to give him any concern as to how it will be received by a willing and eager public.}^{107}\]

Tennyson had done what his critics had demanded, and his public wanted. He had “brought the living world of shops and ships, and going to sea, and going to school, under poetic control.”\textsuperscript{108} This was what the mid-Victorians were looking for when they demanded that a poem should deal with modern life; they were wanting a selective, and perhaps sentimentalised, treatment of “the obvious facts of human nature,” using well-known techniques to elicit approved-of responses. A poem which demonstrates what subjects they wished to be selected, and which responses they approved of, provides an insight into Victorian society that the student of the contemporary minority literature should not disregard. \textit{Enoch Arden} shows that in 1864 the minority could still share in the majority responses.
A scene from *Enoch Arden*, Neptune Films, 1914.
On location at Polperro, Cornwall.
Reproduced by permission of Mr. John M. East.

'Enoch's Island' by Edward Lear, now in the Usher Gallery at Lincoln.
A NOTE ON THE FILM VERSIONS OF ENOCH ARDEN

The four silent film versions of *Enoch Arden*, made between 1908 and 1915, are remarkable evidence that the poem kept the respect of a wide public long after it had lost that of the critics. The respect of that public was one of the things that stereotyped our modern image of the poem. In the films themselves can be seen an elaborate reverence for Tennyson’s poem, but also the development of new techniques for the cinema, springing directly from the poem’s narrative structure.

Reverence, and an eye to the standing of their newly-formed film company, were the key-notes of the Neptune Films production *Enoch Arden*, made in 1914. It was the most elaborate of their first season’s films, for which they had gathered a star cast. Gerald Lawrence wrote the scenario, and also played the role of Enoch: Fay Davis was Annie, Ben Webster was Philip Ray, May Whitty was Miriam Lane, and J. M. East (who, like so many of the early film-actors, had made his name in popular theatre) took, for this film, a small part as Miriam’s husband. Alfred Willmore (now much better known as Michael MacLiammoir, but then only fifteen years old) played Annie’s son “who ever looked his wish”, that she should remarry.

The shooting was planned in two parts: the exteriors were to be done on location in the summer, and the interiors in the studios at Elstree in the autumn. Location shooting began down at Polperro in Cornwall on August 9th, 1914, in that month of ominously fine weather; then the unit moved over to the Scilly Isles, to the tropical gardens at Tesco for the shots of Enoch on his desert island; finally, they went to Kingsdown, near Deal, to use an old windmill as Philip Ray’s mill, and to film one of the rescue attempts made by Enoch, who “thrice had plucked a life/From the dread sweep of the down-streaming seas”.

Two months later, the interiors were shot at Elstree, and Percy Nash, the general manager of Neptune, gave an interview to the trade-paper *Bioscope*. “*Enoch Arden*”, he said, “is a subject exclusively British. It was written by a British poet laureate, with intimate and exclusively British surroundings... the production has been a work of love”. So patriotic an interpretation of the poem was
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at once an answer to earlier American film versions, and an appeal to the 1914 public. The film was reasonably well reviewed: "without being riotously sensational", Bioscope's reviewer reported, "the film makes a dramatic and moving story", but it was the character acting and the pretty locations that caused most comment — the review was headed "An English Picture Poem". The film did not, however, make much money for Neptune; it was a prestige production for them, the distributors recommended it only for "high-class dates" — like Bath, Bristol and Cheltenham — and the production costs of so much location work must have been high.

The film is of interest to Tennysonians because it was so traditional in its reading of the poem. A "picture poem" needed settings more picturesque than a box-office draw melodrama. The tropical scenery must be real. The cast wore eighteenth-century costume, as the poem was set "a hundred years" before its publication. The spirit of the production is well brought out in the still from it here reproduced. It shows Enoch being carried back home after he had slipped, clambering on a mast in the harbour — "A limb was broken when they lifted him". The carefully posed 'characters' from the village lean picturesquely to the right and left, the woman in the back row clasps her hands together in horror, and of the men only the hero appears to have been allowed to show his own hair without a wig; but it is a dramatically posed group, and it is a faithful presentation of a single line of the poem. Many people must have read the poem in this spirit, too, without much analysis, but with great respect.

In America, though, Enoch Arden became the vehicle for technical innovation in the cinema. David Wark Griffith, the pioneer American film-maker, returned to the subject again and again. He brought to it a background similar to that of J. M. East and the Neptune company, for he had acted in the popular theatre in such plays as East Lynne, but there was one great difference in his entry to the world of cinema: for ten years he had lived as a free-lance writer of plays and short stories, and his first introduction to films was as a writer of scenarios. He had a little experience of film-acting when he joined Biograph as a writer in 1907, and he began to direct in the following year. Between 1908 and 1913 he made films at the rate of one twelve-minute and one six-minute reel each week, for many of which he drew on Victorian literature — The Cricket on the Hearth, The Song of the Shirt, The Lover's Tale and Pippa Passes were some of his titles. It was Griffith's experience in writing for films that led him to see the technical possibilities in Enoch Arden,
Griffith’s first and most important version of *Enoch Arden* was made in 1908, soon after he joined the Biograph company. Griffith got Frank Wood to prepare a scenario, and directed the shooting himself at Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey. Five years before, in a film *The Great Train Robbery*, a close-up of an outlaw was used as a stunt — he was shown firing at the audience. Griffith now took up the idea seriously to show Annie sitting alone at home, hoping for her husband’s return, and showed a full-screen, large, close-up of her face. He then put into the film, straight after the close-up of Annie, a picture of Enoch, cast away on his island, to contrast with her hopes. This, too, was a new technique, to cut from one scene to another without finishing either, but it is one which, like the focus on a single character, was implicit in the episodic structure of Tennyson’s poem.

The film was released by Biograph on November 3rd, 1908, with the title *After Many Years*. The comments of Lewis Jacobs on this film make an interesting parallel to Philip Drew’s discussion of Tennyson’s use of pace-change in his narrative poems: “Griffith’s *After Many Years* had been a step toward freedom . . . cutting back and forth before a scene was completed solved the space problem, and, moreover, brought in the element of time . . . time could be shortened or lengthened to heighten its dramatic effect”. *After Many Years* was immediately recognised as a masterpiece, was very popular with audiences in America, and was one of the first American films to find favour with European critics. It is not recorded as having any memorable stars; its place in cinema history rests on its technical achievement.

The plot of *Enoch Arden* continued to fascinate Griffith. A short rewrite of the *Enoch Arden* plot, providing a villainous rival to replace Philip, was made by Biograph in 1909, with the title *The Rival Fisherman*. In 1911, Griffith wanted a subject for a new venture, a two-reel film, and turned back to *Enoch Arden*. The two-reel film seems a simple and obvious innovation, but Biograph were doubtful whether the audience would follow a silent film of more than twelve minutes in length, and Griffith’s successful enlargement of film-length was an important step towards his mammoth masterpieces *The Birth of a Nation* and *Intolerance*. Griffith had made, early in January, two successive reels giving a story and its sequel, *His Trust* and *His Trust Fulfilled*, but he left it another five months before trying again with a complete story in two parts. *Enoch Arden, Part 1* was released on June 12th, 1911, and *Part 2* on June 15th, but were subsequently released together, and were usually shown at one performance. The film was again a success on both sides of the Atlantic, and was popular enough to be re-
issued in England “by request” in April 1914. It was against the competition of this reissue that Percy Nash made his claim that *Enoch Arden* should be filmed “in exclusively British surroundings”.

Griffith moved on from Biograph to a new firm, Mutual, and then, in 1915, moved yet again, to Triangle Productions. One of the last films he made for Mutual before this second move was yet another version of *Enoch Arden*, again under its own title, and this time exemplifying the rise of the star system in American filmmaking. Griffith himself had adapted the scenario from Tennyson’s poem, re-using the techniques developed for *After Many Years*, and supervised the production, though he did not actually direct it; he took a small part as Annie’s father. Lillian Gish, then aged only eighteen, played Annie; Wallace Reid was Philip Ray, and Alfred Paget was Enoch Arden. The emphasis of Griffith’s new version was on mood, and on the attempt to show on silent film the changing attitudes of the characters, in marked contrast to the “period” interpretation of the poem in the British film of the previous year. The new *Enoch Arden* was released by Mutual in April 1915, and later reissued by Triangle with the title *The Fatal Marriage*, a reminiscence of the Southerne play noted above as an analogue of *Enoch Arden*. Vachel Lindsay, in his early history of film-making, called this final *Enoch Arden* version by Griffith “the most successful motion picture drama of the intimate type”.

Early film-making was still new enough, when Griffith in America, and the Neptune Company in England, started work, to be influenced by the enthusiasms of individual directors. While the chase had already established itself as a cinematic cliché, and far too much filming was simply the careful photography of theatrical melodrama, without the benefit of hearing the words, much effort went into attempts to translate literary classics into the new medium, partly no doubt to make films respectable to a public which suspected “picture palaces”, but also because in the literature of their youth directors found worthwhile imaginative material for their scenarios. It was in this situation that *Enoch Arden*, that most Victorian of poems, and already growing old-fashioned, provided a basis for experiment in the new creative medium of film.
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NOTES AND SOURCES

The collected edition of *The Poems of Tennyson* (Longmans Annotated English Poets, 1969) edited by Christopher Ricks (hereafter cited as “Ricks”) is used here in preference to the Eversley Edition of Tennyson’s *Works*. I wish to thank the Director of the Tennyson Research Centre, Lincoln, for access to the Tennyson Material there; Mrs. N. Campbell, of the Centre, for directing me to useful sources; the National Film Archive Reference Library, for help in preparing the Note on Film Versions; Mr. J. M. East for permission to reproduce the still from the Neptune Films *Enoch Arden*; and the Research Board of Leicester University, for a grant towards the cost of research.


2. George Saintsbury, *A History of Nineteenth Century Literature* (1901), 256: *Times*, August 23, 1864, p. 4: “. . . about 20,000 copies have been sold”.

3. Hallam Tennyson, *Tennyson, a Memoir* (1897), II, 6 (cited below as Memoir).


5. *Chambers Journal*, 4th s., 39 (September 24, 1864), 620. Even the hyper-critical *Saturday Review* was “completely adulatory”: Merle M. Bevington, *The Saturday Review*, 1855-68 (New York, 1941) 207; *Saturday Review*, XVIII (August 20, 1864), 243-244.


8. *British Controversialist*, XXII (January, 1865), 34.


10. *Memoir*, II, 16. This was in a letter to Tennyson: to one of his other correspondents, Browning was less fulsome; indeed, he even sketched out an entirely different ending to the story, in which Enoch dies without revealing his identity to Miriam Lane, and has a pauper’s funeral. Philip and Annie are out walking with their children when the cart passes by; Philip “improves” the occasion by pointing out the pauper’s death as a result of self-indulgence in the ale-house, and Annie allows herself “a little retrospective thankfulness” that Enoch had died in the storm, and not come to such a disreputable end. While Tennyson is prepared to use irony during the development of the story, Browning wishes to let the story end on a note of ironic misunderstanding. See Browning’s letter, September 2, 1864, in *Robert Browning and Julia Wedgwood: A broken friendship revealed in their letters*, edited by Richard Curle (1937), pp. 75-77.


12. See Section III.

Both Fitzgerald and Cornwall are quoted from Joanna Richardson, *The Pre-eminent Victorian* (1962), 146.


Cf. J. C. Thomson, *Bibliography of... Tennyson* (1905), 38: “this is probably the first of his volumes that gained an immediate popular audience”. For further discussion of its popularity, see Hallam Tennyson’s Memoir, II, 6-8-9, and a brilliant picture of the poem being read aloud by the squire or parson, in G. M. Young’s Warton Lecture for 1939, “The Age of Tennyson”, reprinted in *Critical Essays on the Poetry of Tennyson*, edited by John Killham (1959), 25-40. Among further evidence of popularity are: 28 translations into a total of 10 languages, at least 12 English editions before 1900 (excluding Moxon/Macmillan reprints), three stage versions, and four films, and a setting for piano and recitation by Richard Strauss (Forberg, 1898). (See Note, “Film Versions”).


“The Tennyson”, *Writers and their Work*, No. 83 (1957), 27.


*Memoir*, II, 6.

*Tennyson Sixty Years After* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1948), 167.


*Memoir*, II, 6.

“Tennyson Sixty Years After” (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1948), 167.


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35. Reprinted in Hall, Book of British Ballads (1853) and Whitelaw, Book of Scottish Song (1844). Whitelaw (p. 204) notes that the story was performed in the streets of Edinburgh by dancing dogs, and Hall (p. 415) says: "In no part of the world is the poem a stranger".

36. Memoir, II, 5. The song was identified by Andre Theuriet in "La Poesie populaire et la vie rustique", Sous Bois (Paris 1878), and is printed in Chants et Chansons populaires des provinces de l'Ouest (Niort, 1866), and in A. Beljarné, Enoch Arden (Paris, 1892), 14-15.


40. Household Words, December 7, 1858, p. 6-18, Christmas Number for volume XIX, not numbered with series: reprinted as a separate short story in E. C. Gaskell, Right at Last (1860).

41. "Homeward Bound" was in A. A. Procter, Legends and Lyrics (1858), 48-58: it was suggested as a source by Edward Marshall, Notes and Queries, 7th series, VII (April 1889), 312 and E. L. Didier, The Book-lover, II (1901), 374-376. Hallam's denial is in Memoir, II, 1. Ricks, p. 1129, points out that there is a copy of Legends and Lyrics among Tennyson's books at Lincoln, but treats it as an analogue, not a source.

42. Ricks, p. 1129: where he also cites a contemporary letter noting the parallel between the two stories. Enoch Arden was in proof for two years before publication (see n. 1, above).

43. Their friendship is discussed more fully in P. G. Scott, "Tennyson and Clough", Tennyson Research Bulletin, No. 3 (1969), 64-70, and some Clough-Tennyson letters are given in P. G. Scott, "Tennyson's Celtic Reading", Tennyson Research Bulletin, No. 2 (1968), Paper 2.


46. Printed in Memoir, I, 475 n. MS. dispersed among Hallam Tennyson's mock-up of the Memoir at Lincoln.

47. Henry Graham Dakyns, "Tennyson, Clough, and the Classics" in Tennyson and His Friends, edited Hallam Tennyson (1911), 204.

48. The details of this section are based on papers at Lincoln, only now being catalogued: this is from Hallam Tennyson's transcript of his father's diary.

49. Memoir, I, 477.


51. Ricks, p. 1129: the echoes are in lines 246, 248-9, 542 and 742.
52. MS letter at Lincoln: see P. G. Scott, “The Source-Texts of Tennyson’s Enoch Arden and Aylmer’s Field”, Tennyson Research Bulletin, No. 2 (1968), Item C6, for this letter. It is at least possible that Amy Woolner’s printed text, which she implies, but nowhere states, to be the one that her father gave to Tennyson, was in fact written after Enoch Arden. The original outline was not among the Tennyson papers in 1892, and, since Mrs. Woolner wrote to Hallam Tennyson then to ask for it, was apparently not among Woolner’s papers either.


54. Amy Woolner, 212.

55. Memoir, I, 480. The “Dedication” was completed by January 7 (Emily Tennyson’s Diary, now at Lincoln, a most valuable source for day to day events).

56. Memoir, I, 483.

57. Memoir, I, 515.

58. Sir Charles Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson (1949), 350. Among the alterations made were the insertion of the name of Enoch’s ship, and the expansion of the title from Enoch to Enoch Arden, made in an early mock-up of the text (Ricks, p. 1129).


60. Times, April 22, 1869, p. 6, satirised by Arnold in Friendship’s Garland, Letter VIII. cf. Nicolson, loc. cit. in note 84 below.

61. British Controversialist, XII (March, 1865), 185: “It is not very heroic, nor altogether very moral, for [Annie] to marry again, supposing she did know he were dead.”

62. Legends and Lyrics (1838), 58.

63. British Controversialist, XII (April, 1865), 270.

64. But not criminally culpable. W. E. Baxter, Notes and Queries, 3rd series, VI (1864), 238.

65. British Controversialist, XII (February, 1865), 106.

66. Household Words, Christmas Number (December 7, 1858), 17. Contrast Thomas Southerne’s Fatal Marriage (1694), where the weight of judgement is put entirely on the wife Isabella (especially II, iii).

67. This is the ending of the original story: a continuation, concluding happily, was later concocted, but was never popular. Cf. the attempt made to continue Enoch Arden by Miss C. H. Parish, of Teignmouth, published in 1866, of which a copy is at Lincoln.

68. The Henry Leslie version is his melodrama, The Mariner’s Compass (1863); see Michael R. Booth, English Melodrama (1965), 149. This play, although given a happy ending, was obviously produced because of the success of Enoch Arden, as was J. Stirling Coyne’s The Home Wreck, which opened at the Surrey Theatre on February 8, 1869. Mrs. Henry Wood’s Lady Isabel, in East Lynne, suffers in a silent proximity similar to Enoch’s, but through her own fault. Walter More, in Dickens’s “The Amusements of the People” (Household Words, March 30, 1850), breaks in on the newly married Eva and Geoffrey unintentionally: Edgar and Eleanor Johnson, The Dickens Theatrical Reader (1964), 247-8.
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72. *Guardian*, XIX (Wednesday, August 31, 1864), 857. See also *Illustrated Times*, V (August 20, 1864), 122: "We do not say that Enoch was right. We do say that his was a difficult question".

73. *British Quarterly Review*, XL (1864), 467.


76. John Allen to Tennyson, October 12, 1864: MS letter at Lincoln (Box 17, Clerical, A-W) at present being recatalogued.

77. *Quarterly Review*, CXIII (April, 1863), 490.

78. Michael Sadleir, "*Lady Audley's Secret*," *T.L.S.* (May 11, 1940), 236. It had previously been printed in two periodicals, *Robin Goodfellow*, and *The Sixpenny Magazine*, and was immediately adapted as a melodrama by C. H. Hazlewood.


80. *British Quarterly Review*, XL (1864), 463.

81. *Athenaeum*, XL (August 13, 1864), 201-202. Cf. also the *British Controversialist*, XII (1865), 29: Tennyson has "been seduced by the gigantic vice of modern literature — sensationalism".

82. *British Controversialist*, "devoted to the impartial and deliberate discussion of important questions," XII (January-April, 1865), 28-34, 100-106, 181-190, 261-270. The comment on readership is from *Alfred Tennyson, an Annotated Bibliography*, edited by Sir Charles Tennyson and Christine Fall (Athens, Georgia, 1967), p. 86. See also Michael Wolf "*The British Controversialist*", *Victorian Periodicals Newsletter*, No. 2 (June 1968), 27-45.

83. *Illustrated Times*, V (August 20, 1864), 122.

84. Cf. also Tennyson's defence of the morality of the poem to Queen Victoria, given by Harold Nicolson from an unnamed German source: he pointed to a child walking in the distance and said that, if his critics were right, "Little Anna, yonder, would be considered a child born in illicit wedlock." The Queen eventually answered, as did Tennyson's readers, "God bless him! He did right after all." *Tennyson* (2nd ed., 1925), 189-191.


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38. MS. diary at Lincoln. See also Edgar and Eleanor Johnson, *The Dickens Theatrical Reader* (1964), 203, for a visit to the theatre by Tennyson in 1845.


44. The five illustrated editions of *Enoch Arden*, known to me, are these, of which (i), (ii) and (v), are in the Tennyson Research Centre, Lincoln: (i) by Arthur Hughes. (London, Moxon: 1866). (ii) by various artists (Boston, Ticknor and Fields: 1865). (iii) in the “vest-pocket Series of Standard and Popular Authors.” (Boston: 1876). (iv) by George T. Andrew, Edmund Garrett, and Chas. Copeland. (New York, 1887). (v) a school edition, edited W. J. Rolfe (Boston, Houghton, Mifflin: 1887), which reprints the Hughes illustrations. In addition, a water-colour of “Enoch’s Island” by Edward Lear, one of a series of illustrations to Tennyson’s poems, is in the Usher Gallery at Lincoln (Sir Charles Tennyson, *The Tennyson Collection*, Lincoln, 1963, p. 9). An interesting scrap of a letter in Tennyson’s own hand-writing complains that Hughes’s illustrations were inaccurate (Tennyson to his wife, 6 December, 1865):

“I met Joseph Hooker who told me my tropical island was all right; but Arthur Hughes in his illustrations has made it all wrong, putting a herd of antelopes upon it which never occurs in Polynesia.”

[I am indebted to Mrs. Campbell for finding and dating this letter for me in the Centre].


47. Emily Tennyson’s diary (at Lincoln), August 5, 1860.

48. It is interesting, in the light of later criticism of the closing line of *Enoch Arden*, to note that Tennyson himself considered it a particularly powerful ending. He explained it to the American critic E. C. Tainsh: “The costly funeral is all poor Annie could do for him after he is gone — entirely introduced for her sake and in my opinion, quite necessary to the Per­fection of the Poem” (in K. W. Cameron, “Tennyson to Edward Campbell Tainsh”, *Emerson Society Quarterly*, XIX (1960), 29-35). Browning had been told by Tennyson that the ending was particularly powerful, but disagreed: “the concluding touch in the poem about the fine funeral — which Tennyson gave me to believe was a very pregnant one — strikes me as ambiguous and unlucky” (in *Robert Browning and Julia Wedgwood*, edited by Richard Curle (1937), 77).

The funeral also turns up in Mrs. Gaskell’s two versions of the story: in *Sylvia’s Lovers*, a brief last page describes the memorial almshouses erected to the memory of Philip Hepburn, and “The Manchester Marriage”.
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closes with a well-tended grave for the exile. The same motif is used ironically in Lady Audley's Secret, ch. V, where the devoted husband erects a headstone for his wife, who is really alive and remarried.

99. A good contemporary discussion of this is given by Elisabeth J. Hasell, in Blackwood's, XCVI (1864), 555-572.

100. Cf. My Poll and my Partner Joe: "Dreams are sure to come contrary." (Hiss the Villain, edited M. R. Booth, p. 134). Mrs. Gaskell shows her separation from popular narrative as for the vision in "The Manchester Marriage" there is a naturalistic explanation. Note also E. D. H. Johnson, who shows that the dream-vision was a constant preoccupation of Tennyson personally: The Alien Vision of Victorian Poetry (Princeton, 1952), 28.

101. First edition read "Under a palmtree," altered (1870) after the Blackwood's reviewer pointed out it was a misquotation. Tennyson's use of this text may itself be an anticipation of the real event: it comes from a literal passage, Judges, 4:5: Annie interprets it symbolically, aided by a different text, Revelation, 6:7.

102. Cf. Lotos-Eaters (1.4), "a land/in which it seemed always afternoon".

103. The poem was immediately pirated for the stage by Henry Leslie as The Mariner's Compass (1863), and later adaptations were made by J. S. Coyne, The Home Wreck (1869), and Arthur Mattheson, Enoch Arden, first produced by Edwin Booth in America (Boston, New York, and Philadelphia, 1869), and later as the Crystal Palace Christmas Production, 1876. Mattheson's correspondence with Tennyson is at Lincoln. The New York production was a resounding success, and may well have been an influence on Tennyson in deciding to turn to the stage in the 1870's.

104. An analysis of Aylmer's Field in terms of narrative pace is made by Philip Drew, "'Aylmer's Field': a problem for 'critics", Listener, April 2, 1964, pp. 553-557.

105. This is dealt with more fully in the Note on Film Versions.


107. MS. letter at Lincoln, October 22, 1864.


109. The details about this production are, unless other reference is given, taken from John M. East, 'Neath the Mask, the Story of the East Family (1967), 297-300, or from information kindly supplied by Mr. East. Mr. East was able to draw for his book, not only on the family records, but also on the personal reminiscences of Gerald Lawrence, the star of Enoch Arden.

110. Bioscope, November 12, 1914, p. 600.


112. Biographical details are drawn from Iris Barry, David Wark Griffith, American Film Maker (New York, 1965), 7-13, which also includes a useful list of Griffith's films by Eileen Bowser. Other details of the films are given by Seymour Stern, An Index to the Creative Work of David Wark Griffith, Sight and Sound Index Series: No. 2, Part I (1944), and No. 7, Part II(b) (1946).

113. A good account of the making of this film, on which I draw here, is given by Lewis Jacobs in The Rise of the American Film, A Critical History (New York, 1939), 102-103.
114. Jacobs, op. cit., p. 106, Cf. Philip Drew, "'Aylmer's Field': a Problem for Critics", Listener, April 2, 1964, p. 556: "The effect is jerky, as if one were watching a film from which most of the frames were missing, so that the action is not a single flowing movement, but a series of abrupt gestures, while from time to time the projector stops as a detail in one of the frames is shown in close-up". Further on, Drew comments: "We see a whole cycle in the history of a plot of land passing like one of those accelerated films of the growth and death of a plant".


116. See Iris Barry, David Wark Griffith (1965), 42.

117. Bioscope, April 9, 1914, viii suppl.: and April 16, 1914, xi suppl. The film was shot in California, and starred Linda Griffith, Jeannie Macpherson, Frank Grandin, Wilfred Lucas, Florence La Badie, and Robert Harron.

118. Seymour Stern, Index, Part II(b), 4-5: and details from unmarked cuttings in the British Film Institute library.

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