



Wright, J. (2020). The Bees of Rome: Representing Social and Spiritual Transition in Victorian Poetry. *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature, and Culture*, 14(3), 395-411.
<https://journal.equinoxpub.com/JSRNC/article/view/19048>

Peer reviewed version

License (if available):
CC BY-NC-ND

[Link to publication record in Explore Bristol Research](#)
PDF-document

This is the accepted author manuscript (AAM). The final published version (version of record) is available online via Equinox Publishing at <https://journal.equinoxpub.com/JSRNC/article/view/19048>. Please refer to any applicable terms of use of the publisher.

University of Bristol - Explore Bristol Research

General rights

This document is made available in accordance with publisher policies. Please cite only the published version using the reference above. Full terms of use are available:
<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/red/research-policy/pure/user-guides/ebr-terms/>

The Charm of Tennyson

Readers of Tennyson's poetry enter charmed lands – 'The Lady of Shalott', 'The Palace of Art', 'The Sleeping Beauty', the story world of *The Princess*, the entire kingdom of Camelot. They meet characters who have been charmed (as in 'The Lotus-Eaters'), or wish to possess charm (such as the speaker of *Maud*), in poems that exert a distinctive stylistic charm of their own.¹ Part of Tennyson's charm can be identified with his extraordinary facility with sound and repetition. But that is not, primarily, what charm meant to Tennyson; or rather, the long historical connection between charm and sound was only one component of his understanding, and it went hand-in-hand with another: an understanding of charm that he had learned from the Roman poet Horace.

Critics discussing poetry and charm have long acknowledged the central relation of 'charm' to sound. Northrop Frye did so influentially in his *Anatomy of Criticism*, where he drew on the classical terms *melos*, *lexis*, and *opsis* (respectively, the sound element of poetry; the written word, with both aural and visual aspects; and poetry's visual element), before offering terms for what he called the 'radicals' of the first and last of these: 'charm' (*melos*) and 'riddle' (*opsis*).² Such linking of 'charm' to *melos* (tune, melody, harmony) leads round in a circle slightly, because the etymology of 'charm' (as Frye also noted) is *carmen* (song). This 'charm' is sound cut free from linguistic sense, but still imparting affect. More recently, Herbert Tucker follows this line of thinking, but takes his own argument in an historical-theoretical direction to focus on what he calls the 'irreference' of charm words (in literature and spell-casting) and the centrality of 'irreference' to both the history and nineteenth-century 'survival' of charm 'after magic'.³ Tucker's 'irreference' is something of a semantic equivalent of the sound-quality of Frye's 'charm'. Where, for Frye, 'charm' in poetry describes 'an independent rhythm equally distinct from metre and from prose', 'an oracular, meditative, irregular, unpredictable, and essentially discontinuous rhythm, emerging from the coincidences of the sound-pattern' (272, 271), Tucker's 'charm' is 'a verbal formula whose irreference compels reality rather than reporting on it', an 'empirical otherness [which]

¹ Describing Tennyson's work and words, critics readily recur to the word 'charm'. Examples include Anna Barton, *Tennyson's Name: Identity and Responsibility in the Poetry of Alfred Lord Tennyson* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 105; Angela Leighton, *On Form: Poetry Aestheticism and the Legacy of a Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 71; Seamus Perry, *Tennyson* (Tavistock: Northcote House, 2005), 24, 112, 113; and Christopher Ricks, *Tennyson*, 2nd edn (London: Macmillan, 1989), 126, 130.

² Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (London: Penguin, 1957), p. 278.

³ Herbert Tucker, 'After Magic: Modern Charm in History, Theory, and Practice', *New Literary History*, 48 (2017), 103-122.

sustains the sort of ontological discreteness and solicits the sort of interactive encounter, that we impute [...] to the literary object' (103-4). In one definition, 'charm' is a quality of sound 'distinct from metre and from prose'; in the other, it is sound distinct from meaning, yet still sound intended to make something happen: Tucker finds that, in the modern (nineteenth-century) survival of charm, meaning and action are set asunder.⁴

In this essay, I'm going to argue that for Tennyson 'charm' is primarily neither of these – that the incantatory quality of his verse (so remarked upon by his contemporary hearers) always meets rhetoric and the poet's responsibility.⁵ Tennyson, Tucker notes, does not always give us 'premium grade charm' in the fully irreferent, sound-based sense.⁶ But nor would he; for his understanding of charm, I am going to argue, is more in touch with the rhetorical tradition than (while toying with enchantment) it is with the idea of magic; certainly more drawn to rhetoric, a balancing of sound and meaning, than to 'irreferent'.

Here is an early poem, 'The sun goes down in the dark blue main' (1827), from the poet aged only 18; its epigraph, from Virgil, is *Irreparabile tempus* (irretrievable time):⁷

The sun goes down in the dark blue main,
To rise the brighter tomorrow;
But oh! what charm can restore again
Those days now consigned to sorrow?

The moon goes down on the calm still night,

⁴ Tucker's insistence on 'irreferent' bespeaks a current trend in Victorian poetry studies but is far from the whole story of charm language in traditions of magic. Most charm language, worldwide, and from pre-modern to recent times, displays the kinds of shared rhetorical formulations and contextual requirements that are the very life of meaning-making (if not always of scholarly documentation). See, e.g., J. Roper (ed.), *Charms, Charmers and Charming: International Research on Verbal Magic* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). Tucker's focus leads him, at one point, to cite Matthew Arnold's 'sweetness and light' (from *Culture and Anarchy* (1869)) as among nineteenth-century phrases that, 'waiving the question of what they do or don't mean, by dint of sheer recitation [...] acquire an uncanny power' (Tucker, 107-8). On the contrary, Arnold's phrase, having its deep (as opposed to Swifitean) roots in Horace's *Ars Poetica*, is not a superficial formulation, but goes to the very heart of Arnold's (much elaborated) subject. See also Thomas Owens, "'Sweetness and Light" from Swift to Arnold', *The Review of English Studies*, 68:283 (2016), 99-122.

⁵ Emily Ritchie and Hallam Tennyson recall 'the roll of his great voice [...] like an incantation'; 'the inspired way in which he chanted to us' poems as they were composed; and that his readings were 'chant-like'. *Memoir, 000*. The word 'chant' shares its etymological root with the words 'incant' and 'enchant': *incāntare*, 'to sing upon or against', as when casting a charm (see *OED*).

⁶ Tucker, 111.

⁷ The epigraph (later deleted) is from *Georgics* III, 284: 'But time meanwhile is flying, flying beyond recall, while we, charmed with love of our theme, linger around each detail!'. The word translated 'charmed' here by H. R. Fairclough is *capti* ('trapped'). Tennyson's preoccupation with irretrievable time is pervasive; but the charm to which it is linked here (entrapment) is not the kind Tennyson would go on to seek. See also footnote 25, below.

To rise sweeter than when she parted;
But oh! what charm can restore the light
Of joy to the broken-hearted?

The blossoms depart in the wintry hour,
To rise in vernal glory;
But oh! what charm can restore the flower
Of youth to the old and hoary?

Each of these stanzas has the structure: statement, exclamation, question. ‘The sun goes down in the dark blue main, / To rise the brighter tomorrow’: statement; ‘But oh!’: exclamation; ‘what charm can restore again / Those days now consigned to sorrow?’: question. This is a poem about a wished-for ‘charm’ that could restore time, joy, and youth. And when the significant refrain of a poem is ‘what charm can restore’, ‘what charm can restore’, ‘what charm can restore’, it is tempting to answer ‘this one’, since we are listening to the capacity of the poetry not only to return on itself, but to become close to an incantation. The questions, though, are rhetorical, not in any idle sense but in a way that points to rhetorical technique: two of the three stanzas are enjambed so that a noun is qualified into a noun-phrase and steps into metaphor (‘light / Of joy’, ‘flower / Of youth’); and in the first stanza ‘restore again’ is weak, and doesn’t mean it. No charm can restore these losses, so if the poem itself forms a kind of answer (offers itself as a kind of charm), it does so by way of self-conscious displacement. No charms can restore, but poems can return: this poem is a literary form trying to get close to the charm-power its speaker craves; the poem wishes to be and is not the kind of charm it talks about. Several features collude in or encourage its charm-like quality: the alternating rising and falling cadence (the lines’ ending on stressed syllables then on unstressed); the gently rocking *abab* rhyme scheme; and the subtly accentual proceedings of the lines, steadily alternating four beats and three beats with varying proportions of lighter syllables between – those accentual ways putting the poem in rhythmic touch with past forms of poetry (restoring *that* past again). Tennyson’s sounds align with the thinking about charm with which literary criticism has become familiar; rhetoric undercuts that charm, but not the more holistic idea of charm that would continue to shape Tennyson’s work.

That holistic sense he encountered early in his life, in the work Horace. Tennyson had begun his Horatian training as a boy; and through the course of his life the emphasis of that inheritance moved from ‘song’, where his training began, to an inseparable focus on stylistic,

rhetorical power. Here is Theodore Redpath's summary of Tennyson's first encounters with Horace:

Alfred used to tell in later years how, before his father considered him fit to go to the school at Louth, he had made him recite by heart on successive mornings all the four Books of Horace's *Odes*. That amounted to over one hundred poems, a good three months' autumn discipline!⁸

Tennyson reported having had Horace so 'thoroughly drummed' into him that 'They use *me* as a lesson-book at schools, and they will call me "that horrible Tennyson." It was not till many years after boyhood that I could like Horace'.⁹ (Poor small Tennyson. But lucky us.) The first extant poems of Tennyson's, from 1822 (the poet then a schoolboy), are three translations of Horace (one of the Epodes and two Odes). One of Tennyson's copies of the *Works* of Horace (he owned several) is annotated throughout.¹⁰ On the inside front board of another is a note in Hallam Tennyson's hand which reads: 'Oct. 12, 1892. One of the last books for which my father asked me (the week before he died)'.¹¹ Tennyson cut his poetry-reciting teeth, then, on charms of a sort, because Horace's *Odes* are *Carmina*: songs, charms (that is the title they bear in Tennyson's library; as, of course, do volumes of Pindar, Anacreon, and others). He also kept Horace near him in his last days.

The *Odes*, or *Carmina*, were poems known in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries for uniting beauty of form and propriety of subject matter; while the advice to a young writer offered in *Ars Poetica* taught that the power to 'charm' was not only the great skill of the true poet, but a great responsibility.¹² The tension and unity early in evidence between incantation and rhetoric in a poem such as 'The sun goes down in the dark blue main' evolved into a defining feature of Tennyson's style. An anecdote from late in Tennyson's life indicates the clear connection between Horace and this kind of 'charm' in the poet's thinking. The *Memoir* includes the following vignette of Tennyson in marvelously straightforward mode later in

⁸ Theodore Redpath, 'Tennyson and the Literature of Greece and Rome', *Studies in Tennyson*, ed. Hallam Tennyson (London: Macmillan, 1981, rpt 1982), p. 105.

⁹ *Memoir*, vol. I, p. 13.

¹⁰ Some of the annotations are transcribed and summarized by A. A. Markley, *Stateliest Measures: Tennyson and the Literature of Greece and Rome* (University of Toronto Press, 2004), pp. 33-37. See also *Tennyson in Lincoln: A Catalogue of the Collections in the Research Centre*, compiled by Nancy Campbell (Tennyson Society: City Library, Lincoln, England, 1971), vol. I.

¹¹ Quintus Horatius Flaccus, *Opera* (Dublin: Grierson, 1721). Flyleaf reads 'A. Tennyson, Xmas day 1838'.

¹² On eighteenth-century literary perspectives on Horace as (in Dryden's words) 'perpetually moral', see Owens.

life, talking with Herbert Warren, then President of Magdalen College, Oxford. The year was 1892, six months before Tennyson died:

April 10th. My father and Warren walked in the ball-room. My father quoted the line of Horace, ‘Nec satis est pulchra esse poemata, dulcia sunt,’ and asked Warren to explain it. Warren said he thought it meant ‘It is not enough for poems to be beautiful and correct in form, they must have a charm.’ ‘Yes,’ my father said, ‘that’s what I think.’¹³

The rest of that thought of Horace, in *Ars Poetica*, is concerned with the vital co-presence of formal perfection and affective content: *Non satis est pulchra esse poemata; dulcia sunt | et quocumque volent animum auditoris agunt* (Loeb translation: “Not enough is it for poems to have beauty: they must have charm, and lead the hearer’s soul where they will”). The Latin word that translators (including Warren) render as ‘charm’ is ‘dulcia’ (singular ‘dulce’), more strictly ‘sweet’, a term perhaps better known in *Ars Poetica* when Horace says that the poet needs to mix ‘the useful with the sweet’, *utile dulci*: ‘He has won every vote who has blended profit [the useful] and pleasure [the agreeable, or sweet], at once delighting and instructing the reader’.¹⁴ ‘Sweetness’, which is a quality or effect of style, belongs to rhetoric and oratory, and specifically to the capacity of those practices to affect the listener (as Horace says, to ‘lead’). In the relevant passages of *Ars Poetica*, *dulcia*, ‘charm’, is always in touch with morality, because it directly concerns action: it is the quality by which poems ‘lead the hearer’s soul’. The word ‘charm’ has long been used to translate *dulcia* in Horace, and was used to Tennyson’s evident approval by Warren, precisely because (if you will allow me to flex the terms for a moment) this is a *dulce* that includes *utile*: it is sweetness (in the classical sense, as a quality of style) *that proposes* something, sweetness crafted *in order to* lead. What is translated ‘charm’ in Horace is a middle concept between ‘beauty’ and ‘use’, *dulce et utile* in one. Tennyson’s early training in Horace taught him this, and it ensured that ‘charm’ for him meant something dignified, holistic, integral to the poetic vocation. Horatian ‘charm’ invokes the responsibility of the poet to balance sweet sound with good sense.

¹³ *Memoir*

¹⁴ I give the Loeb translation, with my alternative terms in brackets; the Latin is: *omne tulit punctum qui miscuit utili dulci, lectorem delectando pariterque monendo* (343-4). For explanation of the range and combination of qualities communicated by *utile dulci*, see Niall Rudd (ed), *Horace, Epistles Book II and Epistle to the Pisones* (*Ars Poetics*) (Cambridge: CUP, 1989).

The terms of literary discussions such as these ('sweetness', 'charm') do not stay in neat separate categories as they are passed between writers and across centuries; and so they will not sustain simple definitions subsequently, even when aspects of the discussion are temporarily ossified by phases of history. By the end of the nineteenth century, the word 'charm' had made its way rather more to one side of any then-current versions of the pairing *dulce et utile*. It had gone to the side of *dulce*, sweetness, delight, and (since Arnold's terms had intervened in *Culture & Anarchy*) 'beauty'. Among some writers, and against the original spirit of Horace (*Non satis est pulchra esse poemata*), the word 'charm' in the nineteenth-century began to align itself with something closer to Horatian *pulchra* (a more formalist, surface quality of perfection) rather than with *dulce* (sweetness *that* moves). Perhaps this is another reason that modern 'charm' carries a tinge of danger with it: that aspect of charm which sets out to move or lead the listener, seemed during the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to have gone undercover, an agent of sly manipulation and ambiguous moral force (a concern long lingering about the aesthetico-rhetorical tradition).¹⁵ By the end of the nineteenth century, as Adrian Poole has observed in writing of Henry James, charm had become 'a key term in the discourse of aestheticism'; it was a word applied to people who seemed (superficially at least) to be perfect, beautiful, untroubled – leading 'a charmed life'.¹⁶ 'Sweetness', 'charm', 'aesthetic' – all complex terms with a pre-history in which sensory and moral indications were, for better or worse, united – got split across the centuries into meaning only one half (or less) of what they had earlier implied.¹⁷ Tennyson's distrust of late nineteenth-century aestheticism was distrust of any art which claimed that *dulce* and *utile* could be spilt – a distrust of irresponsible art in denial of its own nature and workings.

I want to observe some instances of the word 'charm', and examples of Tennyson's charm-worlds, as a means of revealing some of the different associations that 'charm' had for him – associations with enchantment, certainly, but also with the making of Art, the power not only of voice but of text and allusion, poetical acts of rhetorical leading and invitations to readerly interpretation that he had learned and adapted from Horatian poetics. I offer these observations as a means of contending, ultimately, that Tennyson's charm lies, first and

¹⁵ Working by a different route, this complements Tucker's argument about the 'survival' of charm in the modern world (Tucker, 110). On the evolution of 'charm' in the eighteenth century, including brief reference to Horace, see Ros Ballaster. "'Heart-Easing Mirth": Charm in the Eighteenth Century', *Essays in Criticism*, 63:3 (July 2013), 249-74.

¹⁶ Adrian Poole, 'Henry James and Charm', *Essays in Criticism*, 61:2 (2011), 115-36.

¹⁷ Mary Carruthers, 'Sweetness', *Speculum*, 81:4 (2006), 999-1013, discusses the sensory and moral implications of 'sweetness' in medieval texts and translations, centrally noting the concept's complexity and mixed possibilities for interpretation and translation in pre-Romantic biblical scholarship, rhetoric, and aesthetics.

foremost, in his refusal of the split that readers and critics (of his day and ours) have sometimes asserted between form and content. Charm is a condition of some of Tennyson's best-known poems; especially, among the early works, those which can be read as allegories of art, explicitly inviting readers to submit to a spirit of enchantment and (as John Stuart Mill remarked in a review) to 'the guidance of the poet'.¹⁸ That these poems are allegories in which the condition of art is linked to the condition of charm, is itself linked to Tennyson's early training. Charm, I am going to suggest, is at the core of Tennyson's poetics and is a condition of aesthetic value as he understood it.¹⁹

Charm and magic, or enchantment, go along together in several of Tennyson's early poems, enchantment often becoming a way to indicate the thought-challenging nature of the form-content complex. For Tennyson, most simply, enchantment can be understood as a figure for how art works; an atmosphere of enchantment figures the union of style and affect, formal perfection and communal instruction, that he had learned from Horace's 'charm'. Some of Tennyson's best-known poems of the 1830s and 40s are stories of enchantment. It is no surprise to readers to find that 'The charmèd sunset lingered low adown' (19) in the land of 'The Lotus-Eaters' (32/42). The word 'sweet' (mostly in connection with sound) appears in this poem more times than in any other of the same volume (1832 or 1842). And the tension between sweet abstraction and moral duty that pervades the poem figures as a kind of sleepiness. The mariners, 'propt on beds of amaranth and moly', are not *using* the moly, as Odysseus did, as a charm against being charmed.²⁰ The poem closes with the Lotus-Eaters imagining the gods listening to the troubles of human life, as though those troubles were merely an 'ancient tale of wrong, / Like a tale of little meaning tho' the words are strong', a tale 'Chanted from an ill-used race of men', until the mariners conclude that 'slumber is more sweet than toil' and they 'will not wander more' (163-73). If we read this as allegory, then the Lotus-Eaters seem to put Art (as sweetness, enchantment, a wish to be like the Gods and so hear human suffering as a tale with strong words but little meaning) before use. But the 'ancient tale of *wrong*' – merely '*Like* a tale of *little* meaning', not actually a tale of little (or no) meaning – is part of what alerts the non-drowsy reader that all is not well: that human suffering is being ignored. A sleep-inducing, charmed existence of indulging in sound-without-sense is of no use to people, just as the stupefied mariners are of no use to the

¹⁸ See *Tennyson: The Critical Heritage*, ed. John D. Jump (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967), p. 88.

¹⁹ Exploring in his early work the pleasures as well as dangers of sundering *dulce et utile*, Tennyson in fact contributed to their popular separation by later writers of 'aestheticist' works. It was a separation, however, of Horatian 'charm' into 'charm/sweetness' and 'use' that Tennyson would ultimately reject.

²⁰ *Odyssey*, book X, line 302-330.

families they have left behind. In delightfully melodic lines, the poet makes it clear that it is the mariners' condition, not finally a condition of sound or language, that veils content. Between the instances of *dulce* in *Ars Poetica*, is a gentle transition from hearers to readers: poems 'must have charm and lead the *hearer's* soul where they will'; the poet who successfully blends the useful with the agreeable (*utile dulci*) 'at once delighting and instructing the *reader*'. The book of a poet who successfully does this blending, Horace explains, is 'the one to cross the sea and extend to a distant day its author's fame'.²¹ The immediacy of sound (which is more than a formal perfection) casts a charm on the 'hearer' and communicates the 'will' of the poem; the successful combination of delight and instruction is experienced by the 'reader'. The danger for the mariners is that they are hearers only.²²

Turning to one of the most explicit early allegories, Seamus Perry observes that Tennyson 'often provokes the thought that an abundant verbal gift is something requiring constraint as much as opportunity. In fact, he not only provokes such a thought, he entertains it: it is the disquiet that lies behind "The Palace of Art"'.²³ It is indeed. But behind that disquiet is also an Horatian assurance. 'The Palace of Art' (like some of the other early allegories) plays out the debate about sweetness and use for Tennyson's times, presenting both tension and union between *pulchra* and *dulcia*, *dulce et utile*, not only in the poems' subject-matter but in its workings and conclusions. The soul in the poem, who abandons her Palace during the fourth year of residence ('three years / She prospered: on the fourth she fell' (ll. 217-8)), finds that she cannot live well without other people. Her Palace, full of beautiful sounds within (and images of sound), is one in which 'No voice [...] / No voice breaks through' from without, although 'Far off she seemed to hear the dully sound / Of human footsteps fall' (ll. 258-9, 275-6). The soul in the Palace only experiences sounds detached from human presence. Retreating to a 'cottage in the vale' (l. 291), she does not 'think of going back to the separate existence of art once again', as has sometimes been claimed.²⁴ Rather, requesting that the Palace not be destroyed, she more specifically entertains the thought: 'Perchance I may return with others there' (l. 295) – a return which would not be a repetition, because the soul would be in a communal not solipsistic state. This

²¹ The Latin is: *hic et mare transit et longum noto scriptori prorogat aevam* (345-6).

²² Tennyson's Horatian heritage helps to define Victorian poetic explorations of what Robert Browning, in the context of social justice, called 'the printed voice' (see *The Ring and the Book*, I, 167). Another telling instance of 'charm' separated from 'virtue' appears in 'A Character' (1830).

²³ Perry, *Tennyson*, 159.

²⁴ Perry, 159.

possible outcome of the soul's experience – imagined by her, but an achieved component of Tennyson's allegory – is the closing note of a poem which thus seeks to blend the useful with the sweet. Readers may be both delighted and instructed; the 'hearer' of the poem, willingly led to the charm-built Palace, turns out, for worse and better, to be the 'soul' herself – Tennyson's, yours, mine. But, to adapt Warren's translation: it is not enough for Tennyson's poem 'The Palace of Art' to be beautiful, it must offer more of charm in an Horatian sense, combining beauty with affect, in order finally to lead the 'soul' where it will – which is to say, out of the lonely Palace to the prospect of contemplating beauty contextualized by the welfare and instruction of both the individual and wider community.²⁵ The possibility of the soul's returning to the Palace 'with others' just glimpses the 'use' of art off the end of the poem.

Another charm-world is undercut by questions of morality and 'use' in 'The Day-Dream' (1842) (extended from 'The Sleeping Beauty' (1830)). That the young woman in the story has a 'charmèd heart' seems a natural prequel to the next thing the reader is told: 'She sleeps' (20-21). Her Prince arrives, ready for success despite the number of dead men's bodies he has to climb over,

For all his life the charm did talk
 About his path, and hover near
 With words of promise in his walk,
 And whispered voices in his ear. (The Arrival, 21-24)

And then, in the next section, as if, and in fact, by magic: 'A touch, a kiss! the charm was snapt' (The Revival, 1). This is not so much Prince Charming, then, as Prince Un- or De-Charming. The centrally charmed existence in this poem is another living death; and the undoing of *that* charm (the waking of 'Beauty') also, for the poem, awakens a question about the 'use' of 'Art'. The Prince's charmed ability to break the charm on Beauty ends the story.

²⁵ One of Tennyson's most extended allegories on this subject is the Idyll 'Merlin and Vivien' (described by the poet as depicting 'soul at war with sense'). The allegory shows that Soul (Merlin) must not let Sense (Vivien) have too much power to charm (charm literalized as the possession of magic over which Merlin and Vivien argue). But of course Merlin (Soul) does give in, and charm (magic), placed in the power of Sense (Vivien) has the disastrous consequence of disempowering Merlin (Soul) and contributing to the downfall of an entire society. Vivien is repeatedly linked to sweetness (17, 400, 432, 599, 823) and also to song (385-96, 432-35). Merlin, trapped by Vivien, is 'lost to life and use and name and fame' (212, 968). Explicating 'how inclusive' the terms *utile* and *dulce* are in Horace, Rudd explains that 'A poem is *utilis* in the public sense if it promotes the welfare of the community [...]; it is *utilis* to the individual if it helps him to understand, order, and cope with his experience of the world' (231).

But ending the poem comes later: after the story sections come ‘The Moral’ (first called ‘Epilogue’), ‘L’Envoi’, and an(other) ‘Epilogue’. ‘The Moral’ addresses ‘Lady Flora’, not to expound a moral, but to ponder the question of whether trying to find a moral is the right response. The poet-speaker (hopeful of his powers of flattery) tells the Lady Flora: ‘Go look in any glass and say, / What moral is in being fair’ (4). In this context it is clear that by ‘fair’ he means ‘beautiful’; but this remains a deft kind of ‘fair’ that Tennyson was fond of using, and in the context of the debate at large conjures thoughts of the tensions and unities between beauty and equity (there is a good deal of moral in being ‘fair’ in the sense ‘equitable’). ‘A Dream of Fair Women’ (1832) refers to women not just beautiful but, primarily in fact, honourable; and the poems *Maud* and *Idylls* have similarly poised uses.²⁶ Tennyson’s ‘fair’ often holds form and morality together in tension like this, inviting readers not to forget one sense even as they hear the other. The poet-speaker of ‘The Day-Dream’ suggests that a poem has no moral in being ‘fair’:

But any man that walks the mead,
 In bud or blade, or bloom, may find,
 According as his humours lead,
 A meaning suited to his mind.
 And liberal applications lie
 In Art like Nature, dearest friend;
 So ’twere to cramp its use, if I
 Should hook it to some useful end. (Moral, 9-16)

The ‘useful *end*’ (16) is rejected. But the ‘use’ (15) of Art, which would be ‘cramp[ed]’ by explicit moralizing, is thereby protected. The ‘use’ of Art inheres in its ‘liberal applications’ – its capacity to make moral agents of readers by engaging them in their own acts of interpretation. Best take the poem, the speaker concludes, as ‘earnest wed with sport’ (Epilogue, 11).

When John Stuart Mill reviewed Tennyson’s *Poems* (1832, printed as 1833), he quoted the whole of ‘The Lady of Shalott’ except for its last stanza, noting of that stanza that

²⁶ Examples include: ‘I played with the girl when a child; she promised then to be fair’ (*Maud*, I. i. xvii), which harbours the speaker’s embittered sense that Maud has been unfair to him; and, in ‘Gareth and Lynette’, Gareth’s angry question to Merlin at the gates of Camelot – ‘Why mockest thou the stranger that hath been / To thee fair-spoken?’ (278-9) – where his use of ‘fair’ (to mean pleasant) foregrounds the fact that Gareth has been politely telling lies.

it was ‘a “lame and impotent conclusion”, where no conclusion was required’.²⁷ Tennyson made many subsequent revisions to the poem, but despite his sensitivity to the critics he did not follow the spirit of this advice. Rather than cutting the last stanza, he wrote another, which would not have answered Mill’s objection. Here is the final stanza of the 1842 version. The Lady has died, the boat has arrived in Camelot, and ‘round the prow’ the people of Camelot read her name, ‘*The Lady of Shalott*’ (161-2):

Who is this? and what is here?
And in the lighted palace near
Died the sound of royal cheer;
And they crossed themselves for fear,
 All the knights at Camelot:
But Lancelot mused a little space;
He said, ‘She has a lovely face;
God in his mercy lend her grace,
 The Lady of Shalott.’

The final stanza in 1832 was quite different. The insistence of rhyme, in this earlier version, is a charm of sound ‘broken utterly’ in the final lines:

They crossed themselves, their stars they blest,
Knight, minstrel, abbot, squire and guest.
There lay a parchment on her breast,
That puzzled more than all the rest,
 The wellfed wits at Camelot.
‘The web was woven curiously
The charm is broken utterly,
Draw near and fear not – this is I,
 The Lady of Shalott.’

²⁷ *London Review*, July 1835. See *The Critical Heritage*, p. 89. For ‘lame and impotent conclusion’, see *Othello*, II.i.161.

The word ‘charm’ was removed, then, in 1842; and another revision had removed ‘charm’, too, so emphasizing the ‘curse’ instead. The Lady wove a ‘charmèd web’ in 1832, not a ‘magic’ (38) one; and so there was an ambiguity in the 1832 ending, over which charm was broken utterly: the charm that held the Lady at her loom, or the charm of the web itself (were these the same charm or not?). The 1842 version removes that explicit complexity about ‘charm’ but does not remove the mysteries of art and artistry that the word ‘charm’ had previously helped to signal. (As Michael Sullivan explains in his essay in this issue, the revisions likewise move the focus away from the Lady singing and towards her song and its audience – from the work of production, to art and its reception.) Rather than announcing a ‘puzzle’ (as in the first version), the final stanza of 1842 is itself more puzzling. It opens with questions, and then moves to Lancelot’s words, which conclude the poem by seeming to turn the author-figure (the Lady) into a substitute artwork (as too many readers have argued).²⁸ But when Lancelot-the-reader/viewer observes ‘She has a lovely face; / God in his mercy lend her grace’, his lines still harbor, though without saying so directly, those formal and moral senses of being ‘fair’ that I noted above: the lovely face of the Lady, the equitable judgement of God. This is a poem which models artistic production as a charmed and charming process, and which will not *quite* invite its readers to accept form and beauty cut free from the morality that conditions their reception.

Even amid the bluff comedy of a satirical reflection on the making of art – ‘Will Waterproof’s Lyrical Monologue. Made at the Cock’ (1842) – Tennyson brought the conjunction of form and use lightly into play before distracting readers with a clearer (and mocking) emphasis on even Will Waterproof’s poetry-writing as a magical or ritualistic event. The drunken poet-speaker calls for wine, so that he may make

No vain libation to the Muse,
 But may she still be kind,
 And whisper lovely words, and use
 Her influence on the mind,
 [...]

I pledge her, and she comes and dips
 Her laurel in the wine,

28

And lays it thrice upon my lips,
 These favoured lips of mine;
 Until the charm have power to make
 New lifeblood warm the bosom,
 And barren commonplaces break
 In full and kindly blossom. (ll. 9-24)

Here together are the Muse's 'lovely words' and capacity to 'use / Her influence on the mind' (the 'sweet' and the 'useful' combined); and so here too is 'charm', figured by the mock-magic ritual of making, with wine and laurel laid thrice upon the lips, 'Until the charm have power to make / New lifeblood' – the charm leading to the making of something new. The lines make a joke at the expense of this drunken Will (whose 'bosom' is warmed by the 'New lifeblood', but whose words remain mere 'commonplaces' (albeit florid ones). But the association of 'charm' with making things new, for Tennyson, ran deeper.

To balance what is new with what is recognizable is part of Horace's advice in *Ars Poetica*, and also key to Tennyson's sense of poetic charm.²⁹ In one of those moments when he denied the direct influence of an earlier poet's lines on his own, Tennyson also observed (speaking of *The Princess*):

far indeed am I from asserting that books as well as Nature are not, and ought not to be, suggestive to the poet. I am sure that I myself, and many others, find a peculiar charm in those passages of such great masters as Virgil or Milton where they adopt the creation of a bygone poet, and re-clothe it, more or less, according to their own fancy.³⁰

Here 'charm' is precisely a sign of the ability of poems to make things happen: to help make other poems and meanings happen. Such 'charm' is 'suggestive' and signals allusive depth, poetic interconnection, community across time. Tennyson does not exactly want to admit that he has been charmed – he 'find[s]' charm, he says – but he notes that charm is involved in allusive connections. Allusions seem to be like a little bit of magic, which readers (including poets) are invited to interact with (perhaps to learn the charm and re-cast it). Just so, the

²⁹ *Ars Poetica*, 119-152.

³⁰ *Memoir*, 258.

beginning of ‘The Palace of Art’ seems to have been suggested by the opening of Coleridge’s ‘Kubla Khan’; and perhaps the most famous aural effect in *The Princess* (‘And murmuring of innumerable bees’, from the lyric ‘Come down, O maid’) – subsequently charming generations of readers – was suggested to Tennyson by Virgil’s *Aeneid*.³¹ Literary ‘charm’ of this kind might be suggestive or baffling (depending on a reader’s own knowledge and perspective), but in either case it is an invitation to active thought – an invitation to readers to be led by the poet, but specifically led to think further.

Behind one instance of Tennyson’s finding charm in Virgil there lies a particular allusion, which he shared with Herbert Warren during a visit of 1891. Frederick Myers may have noticed this when he made the following comment on the combined presence of song, allusion, and magic in Tennyson’s work. Myers felt that Tennyson’s poetry ‘touches the high-water mark of English song. Apart from the specific allusions, almost every phrase recalls and rivals some intimate magic’; and he quoted as an example: ‘All the charm of all the Muses’.³² That is part of a line from Tennyson’s poem ‘To Virgil. Written at the Request of the Mantuans for the Nineteenth Centenary of Virgil’s Death’ (1882). Here are some excerpts:

III

Thou that singest wheat and woodland, tilth and vineyard, hive and horse and herd;
All the charm of all the Muses often flowering in a lonely word;

IV

Poet of the happy Tityrus piping underneath his beechen bowers;
Poet of the poet-satyr whom the laughing shepherd bound with flowers;

V

Chanter of the Pollio, glorying in the blissful years again to be
Summers of the snakeless meadow, unlaborious earth and oarless sea;

[...]

X

³¹ Jane Wright ‘The Princess and the Bee’, *The Cambridge Quarterly*, 44/3 (2015), 251-273.

³² *Memoir*

I salute thee, Mantovano, I that loved thee since my day began,
Wielder of the stateliest measure ever moulded by the lips of man.

This is the longest line that Tennyson ever wrote. The poet uses alliteration to help the reader hear how the line works ('wheat and woodland' ends one half, 'hive and horse and herd' the rather distended next). There is a tension in this poem between English song metre (the trochaic tetrameter of each first half-line) and 'the stateliest measure' (or classical long line, for which English poets, as Tennyson here, have sought various equivalents). The poem has neither the purposeless beauty of song nor the narrative drive of epic but keeps both within earshot. The poem's own charm (its sweetness, its stylistic middle-way between lyric/beauty and epic/use) has become, for the older Tennyson, a matter of form.

Herbert Warren, talking to Tennyson of Virgil, also admired the same line of the poem, and he quoted it back to the poet – 'All the charm of all the Muses often flowering in a lonely word'; to which Tennyson reportedly replied: "'Yes" [...] and quoted "*cunctantem ramum*" in Book VI, as an instance'.³³ That is Book VI of the *Aeneid*, where appearance of the word *cunctantem* fueled a long scholarly debate (one that continued well into the twentieth century). The passage in which the word *cunctantem* appears describes Aeneas gaining the golden bough, a feat that helps to confirm the prophesy of his future success and enable him to enter the underworld. The Loeb translation is: 'Forthwith Aeneas plucks it and greedily breaks off the clinging bough, and carries it beneath the roof of the prophetic Sibyl'.³⁴ *Cunctantem* is the word the Loeb translator gives as 'clinging' and the word for 'bough', *ramum*, would be expected to follow it, but doesn't (as the anecdote of Tennyson's conversation silently notes, and as is indicated in Tennyson's choice of the word 'lonely' in his poem 'To Virgil' – charm flowering in a 'lonely word', an adjective without its object). The word *cunctantem* troubled scholars, not only because it lacks its object (the bough) but also because it describes how the golden bough responds when Aeneas pulls it. *Cunctantem* was sometimes thought to be an ill-judged ambiguity, because the thought of the golden bough resisting Aeneas in any way would add a note of query to his right to success (Aeneas' right should be confirmed by the bough's giving way easily). The classical scholar John D'Arms sought to resolve this debate: he suggested that the word 'lingering' would be a more fitting translation, and observed that *cunctantem* identifies a subtle and necessary tension

³³ *Memoir*

³⁴ *Aeneid*, VI. 211. The Latin is: *corripit Aeneas extemplo avidusque refringet cunctantem, et vatis portat sub tecta Sibyllae.*

between the beauty of the bough and the use-function it has for Aeneas. The word, he argued, points to both beauty and use: '[T]he bough "lingers" not to thwart Aeneas but to keep its own beauty intact for a moment more: [...] Vergil meant the whole scene to be imagined simultaneously'.³⁵ The 'lonely word' that Tennyson appears to have had in mind and to have linked with 'All the charm of the all the Muses', reveals an apt Virgilian ambiguity. Charm, for Tennyson, once again emerges in this company, a quality of his own lingering fascination with the fine balances of beauty and morality, sweetness and use that poetry may both describe and achieve.

Charm has been part of readers' mistrust of Tennyson's soundscapes, as well as of their admiration. Said R. H. Horne: 'he will write you a poem with nothing in it except music, and as if its music were everything, it shall charm your soul'.³⁶ But Tennyson's contemporaries disagree tellingly about the nature of his poetic charm. Benjamin Jowett told Tennyson: 'Your poetry [...] is almost too much impregnated with philosophy, yet this to some minds will be its greatest charm'.³⁷ Aubrey de Vere recalled the poet Sara Coleridge observing the 'inexplicable charm' she found in Tennyson's poems. And de Vere himself found the early poetry especially charming, possessing, he said, using the same phrase, 'an inexplicable charm to be found in them alone. Such was the charm with which many of the early poems captivated me, a charm which they have never lost'.³⁸ Myers, remarking that both the romantic and classical elements of art were needful, and that Tennyson was a master of both, observed that the classical artist carries 'to its utmost height that innate and inexplicable charm in the relations of sound or line or rhythm or colour which makes the essential principle of his art'.³⁹ These various witnesses tell us collectively that the charm of Tennyson's poetry is a quality reaching between the moral realms of philosophy and the artistic realms of good form; and also that Tennyson's charm can feel 'inexplicable'. That last sense may come about, however, because the explication of morality and beauty as though they are ultimately discreet categories is never, as Tennyson knew, the whole story.

Writing of Tennyson in 1872, Robert Buchanan had this to say; his article was titled 'Tennyson's Charm':

³⁵ John H. D'Arms, 'Vergil's Cunctantem (Ramum): *Aeneid*, 6, 211', *The Classical Journal*, 59:6 (March 1964), 265-68 (267).

³⁶ *The Critical Heritage*, 155.

³⁷ *Memoir*

³⁸ *Memoir*

³⁹ *Memoir*

As the public knowledge of good poetry widens (never surely was public ignorance greater than now as to all literature more than fifty years old), we shall be more and more able to ascertain how great an art it must be, how subtle and supreme a genius, which manages to charm any generation as Alfred Tennyson is charming ours.

What is this charm to which wise and foolish yield alike, which warms the hearts of bishops and portly deans, which persuades the smug man of science into approval, which delights youths and maidens, which exists the envy of poets and the despair of scholars? What is the quality of this nectarine drink, that it quickens pulses in those who deem Shelley hysterical and Wordsworth wearisome in the extreme? Why have critics loved Tennyson from the first, and why is the entire British public learning to love him too? Questions readily put, but exceedingly difficult to answer.⁴⁰

Nevertheless, answer them Buchanan did. Two conditions pertained, he said, one an accident of history, the other resulting from the powerful combination of Tennyson's formal achievement and moral commitment. 'Much,' he argued, 'is due to the fact that Tennyson came just in time to reap the harvest sown by those poets of whom he is, in a sense, the direct product,—Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats,—poets whose literary charms society was slow to feel till it flowered forth into the perfect speech of the present Laureate'. At the same time, he said, 'a poet after the Muses' own heart', Tennyson had 'determined to utter nothing base' and had 'resolved to win victory [...] not by Wordsworthian lecturing or Landorian hectoring, neither by fainting-fits after Keats nor screaming-matches after Shelley, but by sheer unadulterated charm of style and manner'. By combining such moral seriousness with formal achievement: 'The charm is complete, the poet has triumphed to the extent of human possibility'. There were two kinds of charm here: the first generated by Tennyson's 'perfect speech', his 'sheer unadulterated charm of style and manner' (charm *as* style, a way with words); the second, a charm constituted specifically by the combination of that 'perfect speech' with the determination 'to utter nothing base': that was 'Tennyson's Charm' in the round. On the one hand, Tennyson's 'sound[s]', 'style', 'ornament' (Buchanan's words) give his poems charm; on the other, charm is specifically the combination of that stylistic achievement with sound poetic judgement, a question of form-and-content together.⁴¹ So an old form of literary-critical ambiguity recurs: 'charm' is a word applied to one half of the

⁴⁰ Robert Buchanan, 'Tennyson's Charm', *The Saint Paul's Magazine*, March 1872, vol. X, 282-303 (284).

⁴¹ 284-5, 299, 289.

form-content diad (the form or style bit), and also a word that contains or labels that diad. Tennyson's charm is his success in combining stylistic achievement with moral content, strong poetic judgement, an ability to move the reader.

I want to close with this late poem, in which, as Christopher Ricks notes, Tennyson 'made many changes to the drafts [...], including the change from "I" to "he" throughout' – a distancing: 'Far – Far – Away (For Music)' (1889):

What sight so lured him through the fields he knew
As where earth's green stole into heaven's own hue,
Far – far – away?

What sound was dearest in his native dells?
The mellow lin-lan-lone of evening bells
Far – far – away.

What vague world-whisper, mystic pain or joy,
Through those three words would haunt him when a boy,
Far – far – away?

A whisper from his dawn of life? a breath
From some fair dawn beyond the doors of death
Far – far – away?

Far, far, how far? from o'er the gates of Birth,
The faint horizons, all the bounds of earth,
Far – far – away?

What charm in words, a charm no words could give?
O dying words, can Music make you live
Far – far – away?

Like the early poem with which I began, this one asks questions (nine in all, they make up most of the poem), but it includes only one answer, since mostly the poem answers questions with questions. That answer is 'The mellow lin-lan-lone of evening bells / Far – far – away':

'lin-lan-lone' holding 'ding-dang-dong' at a quietened distance and enabling the reader to hear 'lone', even a subtle 'a..-lone', in a subdued referential language which is sounded out from within the words' music. Dwight Culler called 'the central paradox of this poem, that language has a power which language itself cannot express'. I find a willingness to nonthink in this kind of response (captured by the word 'express': does that mean 'describe'? 'communicate'? 'squeeze out'?). Tennyson's words might encourage readers to succumb to such a feeling of 'paradox', but they do not themselves work by paradox: they describe and instantiate the power of language superbly. The poet recorded that 'The words "far, far away" had always a strange charm for me'.⁴² His point, in the observation and the poem, is that words *have* power, exert 'charm', even over great stretches of space and time, 'Far – far – away'. It matters that the line concerned – 'What charm in words, a charm no words could give?' – is, aside from its prosodic poise, another carefully-weighted question and continues the poem's rhetorical extension. Tennyson must have been aware that these might be counted among his own 'dying words'; but also that the music of those words *would* make them live 'Far – far – away' (as they live now). This poem might be 'For Music' in several senses: offering itself to be set to music; presenting itself as an offering *to* Music (these might be requests for Music to come to the poet's aid); but in either case making its own music – for the sake of music-making. The poem's sounds, repetitions, questions have their 'use' in evoking longing, reaching, a sounding out of finite human life in infinite time; a use in bridging the past and present, bringing the individual into contact with a (transhistorical) community.

'Charm' captures those qualities of Tennyson's poetry that include his chanting insistence on sounds, his recurrence to magical places, and the capacity of his allegories to tease readers out of thought. Horace's *dulcia*, 'charm', I want to suggest to you, is hardwired into Tennyson's poetics: sweetness *that* leads you, delight *that* knows itself inseparable from morality, even when morality is not its direct concern. This is the charm of Tennyson. In the spirit of Horace, Tennyson's poems expect to be heard and to 'lead the hearer's soul'. But, both with and against the spirit of Horace, Tennyson – who knows that rhetoric is vital to but not the sole basis of poetics, who knows that readers are not quite the same as hearers, and whose sense of poetic responsibility meets the aesthetic debates of his times – also encourages readers to *recognize* poetry's leading ways and to make of those ways what *they* will: the responsible poet inviting responsible reading. Tennyson's 'charm' is that quality of

⁴² *Memoir*

integration between form and force that is itself a making of meaning; formal achievement *that* leads you. Part of the reason, I think, that this quality of Tennyson's poems can feel elusive, even evasive – the allegory unresolvable, the charm 'inexplicable' – is that Tennyson had his own Horace-influenced understanding of 'charm': not only as song (and certainly not in the guise of 'irreference'), but as sweetness-and-use inextricable. May such charm as this always charm readers, in the truest sense.