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## UNIT 3 TEXT AND ANALYSIS OF “MORTE D’ARTHUR”

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### 3.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

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As we have already discussed in the previous unit, Tennyson’s poem “Morte d’Arthur” is part of his Arthurian epic which he titled *The Idylls of the King*. *The Idylls*, in keeping with the epic tradition, comprises twelve books of which “Morte d’Arthur” (“The Passing of Arthur”) is the eleventh Book.

After studying this Unit, you will be able to

- \* critically analyse the poem “Morte d’Arthur”
- \* discuss the main themes of the poem and
- \* explain the link between the poem and the Victorian Age.

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### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

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Tennyson is regarded as one of the greatest poets of Victorian England. He was made the Poet Laureate of Britain in 1850. He is referred to as Alfred *Lord* Tennyson because he was honoured with the title Baron and Barons were always known by their title, Lord.

As already mentioned, “Morte d’Arthur”, or “*The Death Of Arthur*”, is rated as the best among the twelve books in Tennyson’s epic, *The Idylls of the King*. *The Idylls* is based on Sir Thomas Malory’s medieval work of the same name, *Le Morte d’Arthur*. Sir Thomas Malory had translated it from French. King Arthur was a legendary British leader who is believed to have led the defence of Britain against Saxon invaders in the late 5th and early 6th centuries. He was a unifying force and loved by his people. Arthur, sometimes known as ‘the king that was and the king that shall be’, is recognised all over the world as one of the most famous figures of British myth and legend.

“The adventures of the legendary King Arthur, with his Round Table Fellowship of Knights based in the mythical city of Camelot, were told and retold between the 11th and 15th centuries in hundreds of manuscripts in at least a dozen languages. “What place is there within the bounds of the Empire of Christendom to which the winged praise of Arthur the Briton has not extended?” wrote the 12th-century chronicler Alanus ab Insulis (or Alain de Lille). Today Arthurian stories are told in English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Icelandic, Dutch, Russian, and even Hebrew.”<sup>1</sup>

The Round Table is a famous concept of the Arthurian legend. The table at which Arthur and his 12 knights are seated, is round, in the likeness of the world. The Knights who sat at the table are the bravest and truest knights who along with King Arthur are given the task of governing the subjects fairly and justly.

The greatest task undertaken by Arthur’s knights is the quest for the grail, a mysterious vessel linked to the story of Jesus Christ; it is believed to have been used by Christ at the Last Supper, and afterwards by Joseph of Arimathea, to collect the blood that flowed from the Saviour as his body was taken down from the cross. The grail became a holy relic sought by mystics and heroes – and most famously, by Arthur’s fellowship. Many knights perished and weakened both the Round Table and Arthur’s court, preparing the way for the dark days to come when Mordred rose up against Arthur, and ended the dream of Camelot.

Though his end was tragic, King Arthur is celebrated today as a heroic figure, and his story can be seen even today, depicted in the hallowed halls of the British Parliament. Thus this poem is about King Arthur and his chivalry and therefore it serves as a model to rulers who are given the task to rule in an equitable and just manner. The name of King Arthur had been a source of pride for Britain in the Middle Ages and the Arthurian legends were known as ‘The Matter Of Britain’. Tennyson brought the legend forward from the Middle Ages to the Victorian era and thereby illustrated through his poem the enduring appeal of the Arthurian legend. To the Victorians who were celebrating the greatness and expansiveness of Great Britain, this poem held a powerful inspiration.

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### 3.2 TEXT OF THE POEM “MORTE D'ARTHUR”

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So all day long the noise of battle roll'd 1  
Among the mountains by the winter sea;  
Until King Arthur's table, man by man,  
Had fallen in Lyonesse about their Lord,  
King Arthur: then, because his wound was deep, 5  
The bold Sir Bedivere uplifted him,  
Sir Bedivere, the last of all his knights,  
And bore him to a nigh the field  
A broken chancel with a broken cross,  
That stood on a dark strait of barren land. 10  
On one side lay the ocean, and on one  
Lay a great water, and the moon was full.

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere:  
 "The sequel of to-day unsolder  
 The goodliest fellowship of famous knights  
 Whereof thisworld holds record. Such a sleep  
 they sleep - the men I loved I think that we  
 Shall never more, at any future time,  
 Delight our souls with talk of knightly deeds,  
 Walking about the gardens and the halls 20  
 Of Camelot, as in the days that were.  
 I perish by this people which I made,—  
 Tho' Merlin sware that I should come again  
 To rule once more—but let what will be, be,  
 I am so deeply smitten thro' the helm 25  
 That without help I cannot last till morn.  
 Thou therefore take my brand Excalibur,  
 Which was my pride: for thou rememberest how  
 In those old days, one summer noon, an arm 30  
 Rose up from out the bosom of the lake,  
 Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,  
 Holding the sword—and how I row'd across  
 And took it, and have worn it, like a king:  
 And, wheresoever I am sung or told  
 In aftertime, this also shall be known: 35  
 But now delay not: take Excalibur,  
 And fling him far into the middle mere  
 Watch what thou seest, and lightly bring me word."  
 To him replied the bold Sir Bedivere:  
 "It is not meet, Sir King, to leave thee thus, 40  
 Aidless, alone, and smitten thro' the helm.  
 A little thing may harm a wounded man.  
 Yet I thy hest will all perform at full,  
 Watch what I see, and lightly bring thee word."  
 So saying, from the ruin'd shrine he stept 45  
 And in the moon athwart the place of tombs,  
 Where lay the mighty bones of ancient men,  
 Old knights, and over them the sea-wind sang  
 Shrill, chill, with flakes of foam. He, stepping down  
 By zigzag paths, and juts of pointed rock, 50  
 Came on the shining levels of the lake.  
 There drew he forth the brand Excalibur,  
 And o'er him, drawing it, the winter moon,  
 Brightening the skirts of a long cloud, ran forth  
 And sparkled keen with frost against the hilt: 55  
 For all the haft twinkled with diamond sparks,  
 Myriads of topaz-lights, and jacinth work

Of subtlest jewellery. He gazed so long  
That both his eyes were dazzled, as he stood,  
This way and that dividing the swift mind, 60  
In act to throw: but at the last it seem'd  
Better to leave Excalibur conceal'd  
There in the many-knotted water-flags,  
That whistled stiff and dry about the marge.  
So strode he back slow to the wounded King. 65

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere:  
"Hast thou perform'd my mission which I gave?  
What is it thou hast seen, or what hast heard?"

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere: 70

"I heard the ripple washing in the reeds,  
And the wild water lapping on the crag."  
To whom replied King Arthur, faint and pale:  
"Thou hast betray'd thy nature and thy name,  
Not rendering true answer, as beseem'd 75  
Thy fealty, nor like a noble knight:  
For surer sign had follow'd, either hand,  
Or voice, or else a motion of the mere.  
This is a shameful thing for men to lie.  
Yet now, I charge thee, quickly go again 80  
As thou art lief and dear, and do the thing  
I bade thee, watch, and lightly bring me word."  
Then went Sir Bedivere the second time

Across the ridge, and paced beside the mere,  
Counting the dewy pebbles, fixed in thought; 85  
But when he saw the wonder of the hilt,  
How curiously and strangely chased, he smote  
His palms together, and he cried aloud,  
"And if indeed I cast the brand away,  
Surely a precious thing, one worthy note, 90  
Should thus be lost forever from the earth,  
Which might have pleased the eyes of many men.  
What good should follow this, if this were done?  
What harm, undone? deep harm to disobey,  
Seeing obedience is the bond of rule. 95  
Were it well to obey then, if a king demand  
An act unprofitable, against himself?  
The King is sick, and knows not what he does.  
What record, or what relic of my lord  
Should be to aftertime, but empty breath 100  
And rumours of a doubt? but were this kept,

Stored in some treasure-house of mighty kings,  
 Some one might show it at a joust of arms,  
 Saying, 'King Arthur's sword, Excalibur,  
 Wrought by the lonely maiden of the Lake; 105  
 Nine years she wrought it, sitting in the deeps  
 Upon the hidden bases of the hills.'  
 So might some old man speak in the aftertime  
 To all the people, winning reverence.  
 But now much honour and much fame were lost." 110  
 So spake he, clouded with his own conceit,  
 And hid Excalibur the second time,  
 And so strode back slow to the wounded King.  
 Then spoke King Arthur, breathing heavily:  
 "What is it thou hast seen, or what hast heard?" 115  
 And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere:  
 "I heard the water lapping on the crag,  
 And the long ripple washing in the reeds." 120  
 To whom replied King Arthur, much in wrath:  
 "Ah, miserable and unkind, untrue,  
 Unknightly, traitor-hearted! Woe is me!  
 Authority forgets a dying king,  
 Laid widow'd of the power in his eye 125  
 That bow'd the will. I see thee what thou art,  
 For thou, the latest-left of all my knights,  
 In whom should meet the offices of all,  
 Thou wouldst betray me for the precious hilt;  
 Either from lust of gold, or like a  
 Yet, for a man may fail in duty twice,  
 And the third time may prosper, get thee hence:  
 But, if thou spare to fling Excalibur,  
 I will arise and slay thee with my hands." 135  
 Then quickly rose Sir Bedivere, and ran,  
 And, leaping down the ridges lightly, plunged  
 Among the bulrush-beds, and clutch'd the sword,  
 And strongly wheel'd and threw it. The great brand  
 Madelightnings in the splendour of the moon, 140  
 And flashing round and round, and whirl'd in an arch,  
 Shot like a streamer of the northern morn,  
 Seen where the moving isles of winter shock  
 By night, with noises of the northern sea.  
 Soflash'd and fell the brand Excalibur: 145  
 But ere he dipt the surface, rose an arm  
 Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,  
 And caught him by the hilt, and brandish'd him  
 Three times, and drew him under in the mere.

And lightly went the other to the King. 150  
Then spoke King Arthur, drawing thicker breath:  
"Now see I by thine eyes that this is done.  
Speak out: what is it thou hast heard, or seen?"

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere:  
"Sir King, I closed mine eyelids, lest the gems 155  
Should blind my purpose, for I never saw,  
Nor shall see, here or elsewhere, till I die,  
Not tho' I live three lives of mortal men,  
So great a miracle as yonder hilt.

Then with both hands I flung him, wheeling him; 160  
But when I look'd again, behold an arm,  
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,  
That caught him by the hilt, and brandish'd him  
Three times, and drew him under in the mere."

And answer made King Arthur, breathing hard: 165  
"My end draws nigh; 't is time that I were gone.  
Make broad thy shoulders to receive my weight,  
And bear me to the margin; yet I fear  
My wound hath taken cold, and I shall die."

So saying, from the pavement he half rose, 170  
Slowly, with pain, reclining on his arm,  
And looking wistfully with wide blue eyes  
As in a picture. Him Sir Bedivere

Remorsefully regarded thro' his tears, 175  
And would have spoken, but he found not words,  
Then took with care, and kneeling on one knee,  
O'er both his shoulders drew the languid hands,  
And rising bore him thro' the place of tombs.

But, as he walk'd, King Arthur panted hard, 180  
Like one that feels a nightmare on his bed  
When all the house is mute. Sosigh'd the King  
Muttering and murmuring at his ear, "Quick, quick!  
fear it is too late, and I shall die."

But the other swiftly strode from ridge to ridge, 185  
Clothed with his breath, and looking, as he walk'd  
Larger than human on the frozen hills.

He heard the deep behind him, and a cry  
Before. His own thought drove him like a goad.  
Dry clash'd his harness in the icy caves  
And barren chasms, and all to left and right 190  
The bare black cliff clang'd round him, as he based  
His feet on juts of slippery crag that rang  
Sharp-smitten with the dint of armed heels—

And on a sudden, lo! the level lake, 195  
 And the long glories of the winter moon  
 Then saw they how there hove a dusky barge  
 Dark as a funeral scarf from stem to stern,  
 Beneath them; and descending they were ware  
 That all the decks were dense with stately forms  
 Black-stoled, black-hooded, like a dream—by these 200  
 Three Queens with crowns of gold—and from them rose  
 A cry that shiver'd to the tingling stars,  
 And, as it were one voice, an agony  
 Of lamentation, like a wind, that shrills  
 All night in a waste land, where no one comes, 205  
 Or hath come, since the making of the world.  
 Then murmur'd Arthur, "Place me in the barge,"  
 And to the barge they came. There those three Queens  
 Put forth their hands, and took the King, and wept.  
 But she that rose the tallest of them all 210  
 And fairest, laid his head upon her lap,  
 And loosed the shatter'd casque, and chafed his hands,  
 And call'd him by his name, complaining loud  
 And dropping bitter tears against his brow  
 Striped with dark blood: for all his face was white  
 And colourless, and like the wither'd moon  
 Smote by the fresh beam of the springing east;  
 And all his greaves and cuisses dash'd with drops  
 Of onset; and the light and lustrous curls—  
 That made his forehead like a rising sun 220  
 High from the daïs-throne—were parch'd with dust;  
 Or, clotted into points and hanging loose,  
 Mix'd with the knightly growth that fringed his lips.  
 So like a shatter'd column lay the King;  
 Not like that Arthur who, with lance in rest,  
 From spur to plume a star of tournament,  
 Shot thro' the lists at Camelot, and charged  
 Before the eyes of ladies and of kings.  
 Then loudly cried the bold Sir Bedivere:  
 "Ah! my Lord Arthur, whither shall I go? 230  
 Where shall I hide my forehead and my eyes?  
 For now I see the true old times are dead,  
 When every morning brought a noble chance,  
 And every chance brought out a noble knight.  
 Such times have been not since the light that led  
 The holy Elders with the gift of myrrh.  
 But now the whole Round Table is dissolved  
 Which was an image of the mighty world;

And I, the last, go forth companionless,  
 And the days darken round me, and the years,<sup>240</sup>  
 Among new men, strange faces, other minds."  
 And slowly answer'd Arthur from the barge:  
 "The old order changeth, yielding place to new,  
 And God fulfils Himself in many ways,  
 Lest one good custom should corrupt the world. 245  
 Comfort thyself: what comfort is in me?  
 I have lived my life, and that which I have done  
 May He within Himself make pure! but thou,  
 If thou shouldst never see my face again,  
 Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by prayer 250  
 Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice  
 Rise like a fountain for me night and day.  
 For what are men better than sheep or goats  
 That nourish a blind life within the brain,  
 If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer 255  
 Both for themselves and those who call them friend?  
 For so the whole round earth is every way  
 Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.  
 But now farewell. I am going a long way  
 With these thou seest—if indeed I go 260  
 (For all my mind is clouded with a doubt)  
 To the island-valley of Avilion;  
 Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,  
 Nor ever wind blows loudly; but it lies  
 Deep-meadow'd, happy, fair with orchard-lawns 265  
 And bowery hollows crown'd with summer sea,  
 Where I will heal me of my grievous wound."

So said he, and the barge with oar and sail  
 Moved from the brink, like some full-breasted swan  
 That, fluting a wild carol ere her death, 270  
 Ruffles her pure cold plume, and takes the flood  
 With swarthy webs. Long stood Sir Bedivere  
 Revolving many memories, till the hull  
 Look'd one black dot against the verge of dawn,  
 And on the mere the wailing died away. 275

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### 3.3 SUMMARY

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In the previous Unit, we had clubbed this poem with another poem by Tennyson, "The Epic". In "The Epic," we find a poet celebrating Christmas Eve with three of his friends. One of them says that the poet, for reasons best known to him had burnt all the books that he had written on the Arthurian legend, except one which was saved by him. He asks the poet to read out from that

book. This is the poem “Morte d’Arthur”, written about the death of King Arthur. The poet narrates the story of the dying moments of King Arthur, after his final battle with Mordred, the betrayer and usurper of his throne. The situation is grim as all Arthur’s Knights of the Round Table are already killed. Arthur himself is mortally wounded, and is borne by the last surviving knight, Sir Bedivere, to a ruined chapel near a lake.

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### **3.4 LINE BY LINE ANALYSIS OF THE POEM**

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#### **Lines 1-38**

King Arthur reminisces about the glorious days of the past as he tells Bedivere that there will never be another place as great as Camelot. Camelot in the Arthurian legend is a mythical castled city in Great Britain, where King Arthur held court. It is important because it is the location of Arthur’s round table and his knights.

Arthur says he is so badly wounded that he may not survive till the next morning and so he asks Bedivere to take his sword, Excalibur, throw it into the middle of the lake, and watch what happens. Years ago, Arthur had obtained this iconic sword from a white silk-clad arm, holding it out of the same lake. The sword gains power when wielded by a skilled warrior like King Arthur and since his time, has retained its legendary reputation in every story which features it. This mythological sword is identified with a single hero and the hero has to take care that it should not fall into the hands of an enemy owing to its inherent power. Hence King Arthur at the moment of his death calls the only surviving loyal knight, Sir Bedivere and hands him the sword with his order that it should be returned to the Lady of the Lake, the source from where it came rather than be entrusted to whichever knight - no matter how noble - might succeed Arthur as king.

#### **Lines 39-65**

Bedivere doesn't want to leave Arthur alone, but he obeys. He walks in the moonlight through a graveyard to the edge of the lake. When he draws out Excalibur, the jewels on the hilt sparkle in the moonlight. It appears to be so precious, that he prefers to hide the sword than to throw it into the lake as ordered by King Arthur.

#### **Lines 66-82**

When he returns, Arthur asks if he did as commanded and asked him what he heard and saw. Bedivere tells a lie that he heard the sound of a ripple and the wild water hitting the crag as though he had thrown the sword into the water. King Arthur knows that the sword cannot fall into water because it will be caught by an arm rising from the water. He admonishes Bedivere for lying because had he thrown the sword as he was told, he would have got another sign almost like a miracle. So Arthur tells Bedivere to go again and do as commanded.

### **Lines 83-113**

The sword is such a beautiful piece that Bedivere feels it a terrible thing to lose it forever. It has a history of having been shaped for nine years before it was given to Arthur. If the sword disappears forever when thrown into the lake waters, it will not be seen by anyone who can tell the story of the sword to future generations. He wonders what harm will accrue if he does not carry out his King's orders as the sick King does not know what he does. While implicit obedience is the rule of law, when the King's orders may not prove profitable to the King, Bedivere feels that there is nothing wrong in going against the King's command. He returns to the King a second time without accomplishing the task his master had given him.

### **Lines 114-150**

He answers in much the same way when the King asks him if he had done as he was asked to do. The King gets angry and sad that his one surviving Knight has also turned disloyal and has failed to execute the authority of the King. He reprimands him for his disobedience and asks him again to go back to the lake once more and fling the sword into it. Bedivere then runs and flings the sword over the lake, where it whirls and flashes like lightning before being caught by an arm clad in white silk. The arm brandishes Excalibur three times before drawing it down into the water.

### **Lines 151-164**

When Bedivere returns to Arthur, the king asks him what he has seen or heard. Bedivere answers that this time he deliberately closed his eyes to escape the temptation of holding back the beautiful sword and threw it into the lake. When he opened his eyes again, he saw an arm catching and brandishing the sword.

### **Lines 164-206**

Then Arthur asks Bedivere to carry him to the lake before he dies. Bedivere, in tears, carries Arthur through the graveyard. They go along the rocky path until they finally reach the lake. There they see a large black barge filled with black-clad forms and three gold-crowned queens. They hear a great cry of lamentation "like a wind, that shrills / All night in a waste land."

### **Lines 206-228**

Arthur tells Bedivere to place him on the barge. The three queens take him. One of them, the tallest, places his head on her lap, loosens his helmet, and calls him by name, crying. Arthur looks lifeless "like a shatter'd column," not like the king he was.

### **Lines 229-241**

Bedivere then asks Arthur where he should go: "For now I see the true old times are dead / When every morning brought a noble chance." He realizes what has been lost with the end of the Round

Table and despairs of the dark days ahead. He is left companionless and dreads the future where he will be thrown among new men, strange faces and other minds.

### **Lines 242-275**

Arthur answers things are meant to change. The old order changes for the new, says King Arthur. He tells Bedivere to pray for his soul, for men are no better than sheep or goats if they do not pray. He says "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of." The king asks him to pray for his soul, and then tells Bedivere that he is going to Avilion, a kind of paradise, where his wound will be healed. The barge sails across the lake and into the distance, while Bedivere looks on, until the wailing dies away

### **3.4.2 Analysis of the poem**

This narrative poem, written in blank verse, is based on an episode in Arthurian legend and told most memorably in Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*, a prose compilation of Arthurian legend first published in 1485. Tennyson uses some archaic diction to lend the narrative a sense of antiquity, for example, words like "spake," "thou," "thee," and "hast."

The poem is semi-autobiographical. It is inspired by the personal loss suffered by Tennyson after the death of his close friend Arthur Henry Hallam. Arthur Henry Hallam, died suddenly at the age of 22 in 1833. This was the time Tennyson had decided to write a poem on the Arthurian legend. Hence one can feel the sense of sadness and despair when Bedivere loses his King Arthur: "Ah! My Lord Arthur, whither shall I go? / ... For now I see the true old times are dead".

The events of the poem take place after Arthur's war with the traitorous Mordred. In the battle, though Mordred is killed, King Arthur is also left mortally wounded. All his Knights of the Round Table except for Sir Bedivere are dead. The battle has led to the destruction of the Round Table and the glory that was Camelot. Arthur mournfully affirms there will never again be a place like Camelot. Tennyson, the Victorian poet is here providing the inspiration to the people of his times who looked for legends from the ancient days, that spoke about the glory of Britain. Such chivalric deeds were represented in the Arthurian legends and hence Tennyson's choice of Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte D'Arthur* on which he based his poem.

Sir Bedivere is the model of a loyal follower. He tries to obey his lord even when it goes against his better judgment. He carries the Excalibur through an ancient graveyard, in cold winds, over sharp rocks, in obedience to King Arthur's orders. But Bedivere's loyalty is put to test when the beauty and richness of the sword's hilt make him hesitant to throw it into the lake and lose it forever. He finds himself rationalizing why he should disobey his king. But King Arthur is hurt that the last loyal soldier Bedivere has also turned against him, signalling his own waning authority as king: "Authority forgets a king, / Laid widow'd of the power in his eye / That bow'd the will." But Bedivere proves his loyalty after his two initial hesitant attempts. Arthur is pleased and makes one more request to take him to the lake before he dies. Tennyson highlights the difficulty of the journey through his evocative use of harsh words: "The bare black cliff clang'd

round him, as he based / His feet on juts of slippery crag that rang / Sharp-smitten with the dint of armed heels."

In Malory's story, there were three queens on the barge. These queens would carry Arthur to **Avilion**. There they would supposedly heal his wound so that he may one day return to rule Britain once more. Tennyson evokes a clear image of the mortally wounded Arthur being wailed over by the weeping women. This image and the suggestion that he will be healed and will return to power, suggests a comparison to the story of Jesus after the crucifixion.

Bedivere's understanding of what is lost with the departure of Arthur ends the poem. But Arthur had earlier offered him reassurance that change is natural: "The old order changeth, yielding place to new." The poem ends on that note of hope and optimism where the inevitability of change heralds the arrival of a new order.

### 3.4.2 Allegorical Significance

Tennyson, the Poet Laureate of Britain desired to kindle the national pride of fellow Englishmen and showcase the ideals that Victorians identified themselves with. He chose the Arthurian legend as his theme, since King Arthur embodied those ideals far back in his days before the Norman conquest of 1066. King Arthur was celebrated in all the medieval legends as an exemplary ruler. Tennyson transposes the past onto the present to make the ideal Arthurian monarchy illustrative of Queen Victoria's rule. Arthur is said to be "ideal manhood closed in real man" and the "stainless gentleman." His idea of the Round Table where he sat with his Knights is an example of his democratic concept of the King as the first among equal knights. Arthur thus was a democratic monarch whose round table was itself a democratic institution. Thus King Arthur was looked upon as the prototype of a good monarch.

Through the presentation of King Arthur, Tennyson sought to project Queen Victoria as an ideal monarch. Those who know British history will understand that Queen Victoria was the matriarch of the British Empire. She epitomised the values of the era and carved out a new role for the monarchy. During her 63-year reign, a length surpassed only by the current Queen (Queen Elizabeth II), Victoria presided over the social and industrial transformation of Britain, as well as expansion of the empire. But at the end, Arthur was disappointed and betrayed by the Knights. To his dismay he realized his expectations from them were unrealistic and he could not uphold the ideals he had established for himself and the Knights.

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## 3.5 SUMMING UP

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In this Unit, we have discussed a brief summary of the poem followed by textual analysis. The main features of the Arthurian legend and its recreation in Tennyson's poem are also discussed. The allegorical significance of this poem for Victorian society is also brought out in this unit.

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## 3.6 UNIT END QUESTIONS

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1. Write a note on the concept of King Arthur's Round Table.

2. How are Arthur's final lines "The old order changeth, yielding place to new" personally significant for Tennyson?
3. Write a note on the poem as an allegory of Victorian ideals.

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### 3.7 GLOSSARY

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Medieval: Relating or belonging to the Middle Ages.

Legendary: celebrated in fable or legend (an unverified story handed down from earlier times, especially one popularly believed to be historical).

Nigh: close to

Chancel: the space around the altar of a church for the clergy and sometimes the choir, often enclosed by a lattice or railing.

Saxon: Germanic tribal groups from Northern Germany that invaded Britain in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries AD.

Unsolder: remove

Sware: swore

Samite: a heavy silk fabric interwoven with gold or silver and worn in the Middle Ages.

Hest: Command

Athwart: from one side to the other, across

Haft: the handle of an axe or knife

Myriad: innumerable

Topaz: a gemstone in yellow colour

Jacinth: red colour hyacinth flower. Here used to refer to gem of this colour.

Marge (here used in its old meaning) : margin

Beseem: befit

Fealty: loyalty, allegiance

Lief: really, willingly

Casque: helmet, armour worn to protect the head

Greaves: residue left behind after removal of fat

Cuisses: medieval armour worn to protect the thigh

Plume: a large fluffy feather- a token of achievement

Avillion: described by Tennyson as an island valley with ideal weather and fertile land.

Blank Verse: Unrhymed verse in Iambic pentameters. Iambic pentameter refers to the pattern or rhythm of a line of poetry or verse and has to do with the number of syllables in the line and the emphasis placed on those syllables.

Prototype: An original type or form serving as a standard

Archetype: Something that serves as a model

Everyman: an allegorical figure who represents all of mankind

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### 3.8 REFERENCES

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1. [www.historyextra.com>period>medieval](http://www.historyextra.com/period/medieval)