
SUBMERGING THE SUBVERSIVE PAGAN IN TENNYSON'S *IDYLLS OF THE KING*

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COMMON MYTHOPOEIC FEATURES: MOVEMENT FROM CHAOS (PRIMORDIAL) TO ORDER | AMBIGUOUS, ANOMALOUS, OR UNKNOWN CREATORS

SELECTED PASSAGES FROM *EGYPTIAN MYTH: A VERY SHORT INTRODUCTION*

Atum-Ra “acted as both father and mother by giving himself an erection, taking his ‘seed’ into his mouth, and spitting out the first divine couple, Shu and Tefnut. . . . The androgynous nature of the creator was sometimes made clearer by personifying the hand of Atum as a goddess who united with his penis to create life” (Pinch 48-49).

SELECTED PASSAGES FROM *METAMORPHOSES (BOOK 1, “THE SHAPING OF CHANGES”)*

“Before the seas and lands had been created / . . . / Nature displayed a single aspect only / throughout the cosmos; Chaos was its name” (6-9).

“Some god (or kinder nature) settled this / dispute by separating earth from heaven, / and then by separating sea from earth” (26-28).

SELECTED PASSAGES FROM *THE POPOL VUH*

“Whatever there is that might be is simply not there: only the pooled water, only the calm sea, only it alone is pooled” (Tedlock 64).

“Only the Maker, Modeler alone, Sovereign Plumed Serpent, the Bearers, Begetters are in the water, a glittering light. . . . and then humanity was clear, when they conceded the growth, the generation of trees, of bushes, and the growth of life, of humankind, in the blackness, in the early dawn, all because of the Heart of Sky, named Hurricane. Thunderbolt Hurricane comes first, the second is Newborn Thunderbolt, and the third is Sudden Thunderbolt. So there were three of them, as Heart of Sky, who came to the Sovereign Plumed Serpent, when the dawn of life was conceived” (Tedlock 65).

SELECTED PASSAGES FROM *THE PROSE EDDA*

“Niflheim was made many ages before the earth was created, and at its center is the spring called Hvergelmir. . . . First, however, there was that world in the southern region which is called Muspell. It is bright and hot. That region flames and burns and is impassable for foreigners and those who cannot claim it as their native land. . . . Just as coldness and all things grim came from Niflheim, the regions bordering on Muspell were warm and bright, and Ginnungagap was as mild as a windless sky” (Sturluson 12-13).

SELECTED PASSAGES FROM *IDYLLS OF THE KING, “THE COMING OF ARTHUR”*

“For many a petty king ere Arthur came / Ruled in this isle, and ever waging war / Each upon other, wasted all the land; / And still from time to time the heathen host / Swarm’d overseas, and harried what was left. / And so there grew great tracts of wilderness, / Wherein the beast was ever more and more, / But man was less and less, till Arthur came” (5-12).

“I know not whether of himself [Arthur] came, / Or brought by Merlin, who they say, can walk / Unseen at pleasure” (345-47).

“And Arthur and his knighthood for a space / Were all one will, and thro’ that strength the King / Drew in the petty pryncedoms under him, / Fought, and in twelve great battles overcame / The Heathen hordes, and made a realm and reign’d” (514-18).

“. . .he heard of Arthur newly crown’d, / Tho’ not without an uproar made by those / Who cried, ‘He is not Uther’s son’ . . .” (41-43)

“. . .Who is he / That he should rule us? Who hath proven him / King Uther’s son? For lo! we look at him, / And find nor face nor bearing, limbs nor voice, / Are like to those of Uther whom we knew” (67-71).

Then from the castle gateway by the chasm
Descending thro’ the dismal night – a night
In which the bounds of heaven and earth were lost –
Beheld, so high upon the dreary deeps
It seem’d in heaven, a ship, a shape thereof
A dragon wing’d, and all from stem to stern
Bright with a shining people on the decks,
And gone as soon as seen. And then the two
Dropt to the cove, and watch’d the great sea fall,
Wave after wave, each mightier than the last,
‘Till last, a ninth one, gathering half the deep
And full of voices, slowly rose and plunged
Roaring, and all the wave was in flame:
And down the wave and in the flame was borne
A naked babe, and rode to Merlin’s feet,
Who stooped and caught the babe, and cried “The King!
Here is an heir for Uther!” And the fringe
Of that great breaker, sweeping up the strand,
Lash’d at the wizard as he spake the word,
And all at once all round him rose in fire,
So that the child and he were clothed in fire (369-89).

‘And there I saw mage Merlin, whose vast wit
And hundred winters are but as the hands
Of loyal vassals toiling for their liege.
‘And near him stood the Lady of the Lake,
Who knows a subtler magic than his own –
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful.
She gave the King his huge cross-hilted sword,
Whereby to drive the heathen out: a mist
Of incense curl’d about her, and her face
Wellnigh was hidden in the minster gloom;
But there was heard among the holy hymns
A voice as of the waters, for she dwells
Down in a deep; calm, whatsoever storms
May shake the world, and when the surface rolls,
Hath the power to walk the waters like our Lord (279-293).

‘There likewise I beheld Excalibur / . . . / rich / With jewels, elfin Urim, on the hilt, /
Bewildering heart and eye . . . / . . . / Graven in the oldest tongue of all this world, /
“Take me,” but turn the blade and ye shall see, / And written in the speech ye speak
yourself, / “Cast me away!” And sad was Arthur’s face / Taking it, but old Merlin
Counsell’d him, / “Take thou and strike! The time to cast away / Is yet far-off.” So this
great brand the king / Took, and by this will beat his foemen down’ (296-308).

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