

TENNYSON'S LOTOS: THE PLACE WHERE LIFE HIDES AWAY

In a lecture at SUNY, New York (April 10, 1984), perhaps the most renowned contemporary literary critic and theorist in the world, Jacques Derrida, spoke of a paradox in poetic interpretation: If a poem has only one true meaning, then it falls static and deadborn from the poet, and it cannot be fertile material for re-birth through a new poetic perspective. On the other hand, if a poem has an indefinite number of re-interpretations, does not this possibility imply that there is no truth to the poem, that it is merely a matter of opinion, or that it is a kind of game the rules for which vary infinitely? Many scholars have noticed that artifacts in the humanities seem to be susceptible to re-interpretation in each successive generation. «Myths», according to John Addington Symonds, «are everlastingly elastic»¹. This trait he calls the «symbolic pregnancy» of myth, and it applies to other cultural artifacts as well. Catherine Barnes Stevenson believes Tennyson was aware of the «symbolic pregnancy» or the «everlastingly elastic» trait of Homer's tale of the Lotos-Eaters when he used the ancient tale in his eponymous poem². To what extent or in what way is Tennyson's poem «The Lotos-Eaters» everlastingly elastic? Does it have a single interpretation for all times, or at least a definite, settled interpretation among today's scholars?

At the present time there remain differing opinions about the meaning of this poem, and one issue stands out clearly. The poem seems to lack a resolution; what the poet expresses as a result of the poem is unclear. James R. Kincaid found it «difficult to determine which side it [the poem] is on» and by this he means the side of spiritual commitment or that of emotional withdrawal³. Stevenson wrote his article to show some background and historical sources for the «often-discussed ambiguity of the poem»⁴. Alan Grob takes sides against Audrey de Vere who felt that the poem does achieve a unity of tone, a consistent attitude of the poet toward the subjects presented⁵. Grob did not find a resolution to the tension or ambivalence present throughout the poem. Even at the end, he felt the

1. John Addington Symonds, «Nature Myth and Allegories», *Essays Speculative and Suggestive* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1983), p. 335.

2. Catherine Barnes Stevenson, «The Shade of Homer Exorcises the Ghost of De Quincey: Tennyson's 'The Lotos-Eaters'», *Browning Institute Studies*, 10 (1982), 138-140.

3. James R. Kincaid, «Tennyson's Mariners and Spenser's Despair: The Argument of 'The Lotos-Eaters'», *Papers on Language and Literature*, 5 (1969) 273.

4. Stevenson, 119.

5. Alan Grob, «'The Lotos-Eaters': Two Versions of Art», *Modern Philology*, 62 (1964) 126.

poem was «dialectical», a term meaning for him unresolved or failing to achieve unity.

These differences of opinion are major and extremely significant for the interpretation of «The Lotos-Eaters». I believe they can be settled by a new interpretation and I would like to set aside, until the end of this essay, the question whether this interpretation *or any* can be the absolutely final one, which overcomes the «everlastingly elastic» property of poems and literature in general.

The problem of interpretation afflicting «The Lotos-Eaters» according to Kincaid is Tennyson's ambivalence toward life: will the poet commit himself to spiritual development or will he emotionally withdraw? Rather than to repeat the work of Kincaid, Stevenson, Grob, and de Vere in this essay, I will refer to their contributions and will define the poem's ambiguity or tension in much greater detail.

«The Lotos-Eaters» (as any literary work) is composed of at least two levels of meaning for any specific event, image, idea, or word. It is common among theorists of narrative structure to point out that the literary effects are a function of levels of meaning (*Narrative Suspense* by Eric S. Rabkin; and *Narrative and Structure* by John Hallaway). Often, in the least technical terms, a «literal» level of meaning is opposed to a deeper, higher, more universal level, sometimes called «metaphorical».

Perhaps the clearest example of the tension in «The Lotos-Eaters» is line 68 of the 1842 version «There is no joy but calm»⁶. To see how this assertion is syntactically ambiguous, we should look first at the long sentence, of which it is a part: «All things have rest: why should we toil alone, / We only toil, who are the first of things, / And make perpetual moan, Still from one sorrow to another thrown; / Nor ever fold our wings, / And cease from wanderings, / Nor steep our brows in slumber's holy balm; / nor harken what the inner spirit sings, / There is no joy but calm!... / Why should we only toil, the roof and crown of things?»⁷ The speaker of «There is no joy but calm!» is the «inner spirit» of the mariners. Here an inner dialogue occurs, a voice — something like a mythical conscience or, a *δαίμων* (daimon) which Socrates heard — states one-half of the mariners' inner turmoil. Weary of travel, the mariners have the new-found option to halt their mortal efforts to return home; they can remain in the land of the Lotos-Eaters. The most obvious tension in the poem is this decision, but this decision is not as obviously clear in its meaning as it seems. Each persona, the mariners' voice which has

6. *Tennyson's Poetry* ed. Robert W. Hill, J. R. (New York: Norton, 1971), pp. 47-52. All quotes from «The Lotos Eaters» and *Maud* come from this edition and will be cited by line numbers.

7. Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. Albert Cook (New York: Norton, 1967), 116.

been speaking and also their inner spirit, is itself composed of conflicting alternatives. Prior to the suggestion by the inner spirit, the outwardly spoken message of the mariners was ambivalent: they expressed their love of home, yet lamented the toil in their travels homeward.

The message of the inner spirit, similarly complex, has a still deeper meaning, like a message from their unconscious and perhaps the voice of the poet. «There is no joy but calm!» is syntactically ambiguous. Most often the reader would regard «but» as a coordinate conjunction, in which case the sentence means «There is no joy but [*there is*] calm!» This statement means there can never be joy; it means that the mariners must settle, therefore, for a non-joyful «calm» state — at best. In contrast, the sentence can correctly be read in a second way. The word «but» may function as the words «except for», in which case the sentence would read «There is no joy [*except for*] calm», or perhaps more formally and smoothly «The only joy is calm». This second and equally correct reading has a different and very significant meaning. According to this second reading, joy is possible. Notice that the inner spirit does not tell the mariners that they *will* become joyful, whether under this or that circumstance; the inner spirit, under this reading, only limits the possibility of joy to a calm state. As a further clarification, we should notice that this limitation may be either negative or hypothetical. The inner spirit can be asserting, negatively, «There can be no joy that is not calm». This nuance is noteworthy, because there may not ever actually be a living situation for the mariners that is both joyful and calm, even though such a state is not impossible. Alternatively, the second main reading of the sentence may be hypothetical (instead of negative). This nuance is noteworthy because it is future-oriented, more optimistic, and more factual. «There is no joy, [except for] calm» may be stated synonymously and hypothetically as «If there is any joy, it must be calm». If the mariners understand the inner spirit to express this hypothetical nuance, then maybe they will actively and confidently seek joy in a calm state. Should they interpret the second main reading *negatively*, they would resign themselves to a calm state, without assurance that they could actually be at the same time joyful.

The principles of grammar and Boolean logic at work in this analysis of meaning show that the poem has a tension, which is so intricate that a detailed analysis is necessary. To summarize, in the assertion by the inner spirit «There is no calm but joy», there are two main correct readings. According to one, joy is not possible. According to the second main reading, joy is possible. The difference is crucial. Who would be indifferent to happiness?

There are also other features of the fundamental alternative that help to explain the living tension of «The Lotos-Eaters». The mariners do brood about the possibility of having joy, but for understanding the poem's tension

it is equally important to know what the state of the Lotos-Eaters means, because it is an integral part of their decision. In *The Odyssey* Homer did not describe the effects of the «flowery-food» which he called the lotus⁸. He mentioned only *one* effect: a few mariners were «To devour the lotus and forget about a return» (l. 97) to their home. This effect must have been central in Tennyson's mind when he chose to re-envision the tale. Along with this effect, Tennyson added much psychological description.

Primarily the lotus induces calm outward behavior, but there can be heightened or intensified and distorted sensation. The Lotos-Eaters, were introduced by Tennyson, with their «dark faces» of «mild-eyed melancholy». The «enchanted stem» entranced its consumer: «to him the gushing of the wave/Far far away did seem to mourn and rave/On alien shores; and if his fellow spake, / His voice was thin, as some voices from the grave; / And deep-asleep he seem'd, yet all awake, / And music in his ears his beating heart did make» (ll. 31-36). So the lotus makes its consumer somewhat distant or cut off from the environment, while perhaps causing inner excitation of bodily responses. Eleven lines later, Tennyson suggests heightened sensations: «There is sweet music here that softer falls/Than petals from blown roses on the grass...».

In addition to the mild-eyed melancholy, the mariners spoke of other features as they became seduced by the flower. «Let us alone» they repeatedly said — a request that in context (l. 88) meant that they didn't want to be bothered with their labor of life, but it also meant their increasing desire for solitude and inactivity and emotional distance from outward concerns. The mariners became pessimistic developing a sense of futility: «Is there any peace / In ever climbing up the climbing wave» (ll. 94-95). They began to feel estranged from their loved ones at home, and even to be no longer lovable: «Our sons inherit us, our looks are strange, / And we should come like ghosts to trouble joy» (ll. 18-19). They felt inner conflict, which they attempted to eliminate by resolving to remain cut off: «Is there confusion in the little isle? / Let what is broken so remain» (ll. 124-125). By seeing the «far-off sparkling brine» (l. 143), they luxuriated in sensations, which were intensified but also distorted by their trance. Finally, the mariners began to feel «like Gods» hurling thunderbolts and «careless of mankind» (l. 155), a description implying a feeling of omnipotence, disdain for the lot of people, and a much desired distance from the others. Then, the state of the mariners under the influence of the lotus changes in the course of the poem, from a kind of sleep to heightened and distorted sensations and feelings of omnipotence.

These traits mostly show how the mariners became «calm»; the lotus,

8. Grob, 123.

however, stimulated them in a strange fashion, and this duality of effect is one aspect or sign of the poem's main tension now being discussed. As a result of the lotos, the mariners were «To muse and brood and live again in memory» (l. 110), and this description could mean either that their attention placed them in the events of the past (a state of brooding), or that the lotos allowed them to have a kind of interior life produced by memory, perhaps a kind of dream or fantasy life («Muse» calls to mind the Muses which represent the arts). It is because of lines like these that commentators such as Alan Grob claim that the lotos-state is not just a condition of drowsiness but also can be an active, primarily interior state of self-creation, akin to some attitudes toward artistic reverie. The state of a lotos-eater is outwardly calm, but the interior state may have either or both of two descriptions: psychological retreat and passivity, or artistic retreat and creativity.

Since the state of a lotos-eater is crucial for understanding the tension of the poem, and the central decision of the mariners, it should be understood in detail, and modern psychology can help greatly by providing a discursive, systematic description. The condition of the lotos-eaters is remarkably like the state modern psychologists call «schizoid». Rollo May, psychologist and author of *Love and Will*, defines this type of personality to mean «out of touch; avoiding close relationships; the inability to feel»⁹. The mariners felt far removed from the waves; they wanted to be left alone; and they suffered mild-eyed melancholy. Rollo May's definition helps us to understand the condition of the lotos-eaters, because the schizoid state may simply be psychological retreat, or it can be psychological retreat *and* artistic activity. Tennyson suggests that the lotos has these two possible alternative effects. The lotos could induce a state of «divine madness» or creative entrancement as termed by Plato in *The Republic*. The central and only effect, deciding not to return home, that Homer had regarded as the meaning of the lotos, can mean in this poem to decide to remain cut off from outward emotional bonds or to actively create imaginative bonds in an internal perhaps artistic world.

Another psychologist, W. Ronald D. Fairbairn, has a similar attitude about the relevance of the schizoid state for artistic creation. The traits of the schizoid state are «(1) an attitude of omnipotence, (2) an attitude of isolation and detachment, and (3) a preoccupation with inner reality»¹⁰. These features are clearly descriptive of the «mild-eyed melancholy». This state can be conducive to artistic reverie, for a person becomes de-emotionalized and hyper-internalized or intellectualized: «(1) the thought processes

9. Rollo May, *Love and Will* (New York: Dell, 1978), 32.

10. W. Roland D. Fairbairn, *Psychoanalytic Studies of the Personality* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 6.

become highly libidized; and the world of thought tends to become the predominant sphere of creative activity and self-expression; and (2) ideas tend to become substituted for feelings, and intellectual values for emotional values»¹¹. These psychological ideas can help us to understand the main tension in Tennyson's «Lotos-Eaters», and to determine whether this tension becomes resolved. An initial problem of interpretation was to understand what it meant to say «There is no joy but calm!» and now it is clear that this statement has been further expanded to mean «There is no joy but calm in the sense of the schizoid state!»

As a working hypothesis toward the more general problem (of deciding whether the poem's tension becomes resolved), I suggest that Tennyson in «The Lotos-Eaters» was laboriously scrutinizing the meaning and limits of his poetic activity. We do not need to assume that Tennyson's voice is the voice of any particular persona, a danger Robert Lougy warns us against for Tennyson's *Maud*¹². *There are two indications outside of «The Lotos-Eaters» itself. Some evidence can be found in Ann Colley's Tennyson and Madness. Tennyson, she reports, often became depressed and seemed to tend morbidly toward it*¹³. He would, however, seek treatments offered by «hydropathic establishments»; consequently, Colley sees not only in «The Lotos-Eaters» but also in Tennyson as well the «conflicting impulses» of «self-pity pulled against his desire to struggle; idleness vied against action»¹⁴.

More evidence that «The Lotos-Eaters» resembles Tennyson's personal broodings about his poetic endeavors can come from his other poems. If the description of the lotos-condition or the schizoid-condition is prevalent in other works, this fact shows how concerned Tennyson was with this type of psychological state. In *Maud* he writes about calm: «Long have I sigh'd for a calm; God grand I/may find it at last!» (ll. 77-78). This calm is a morbid retreat into the self: «I will bury myself in myself, and the Devil/may pipe to his own» (l. 76). There are many references to a state that is outwardly passionless and yet melancholic; i.e., «Passionless, pale, cold face, star-sweet on a gloom profound» (l. 91).

A description of the psychological state of a lotos-eater is not sufficient to explain why Tennyson grappled with this alternative of life. Why would anyone prefer the lotos-condition? Why would a poet in particular seriously consider it? Does Tennyson consider it? Douglas Kirsner has written a book describing the philosophy of Sartre as schizoid, and the link of this

11. Fairbairn, 20.

12. Robert E. Lougy, «The Sounds and Silence of Madness: Language as Theme in Tennyson's *Maud*» *Victorian Poetry*, 22 (1984), 424.

13. Ann C. Colley, *Tennyson and Madness* (Athens: The Univ. of Georgia Press, 1983), 63.

14. Colley, 65.

psychological state to a world view may show the meaning or the importance of these questions for Tennyson. Kirsner collects several expert opinions in his total view. He cites the psychotherapist Harry Guntrip who wrote a fundamental book on schizoidism. In it Guntrip defines «the schizoid condition» as consisting «in the first place in an attempt to cancel external object-relations and live in a detached and withdrawn way»¹⁵. Guntrip finds this state expressed in Sartre's metaphysics:

These thinkers, from Kierkegaard to Heidegger and Sartre, find human existence to be rooted in anxiety and insecurity, a fundamental dread that ultimately we have no certainties and the only thing we can affirm is "nothingness", "unreality", a final sense of triviality and meaninglessness. This surely is schizoid despair and loss of contact with the verities of emotional reality, rationalized into a philosophy...»¹⁶.

Guntrip defines the state as a unity of opposing tendencies: as a fear of isolation working always in opposition to a fear of emotional proximity. The schizoid psyche fears not having an other, and also fears, being absorbed and thus lost in the other.

This psychologically expressed unity of opposing tendencies, or dialectic, is expressed in Sartre's metaphysical principles:

Thus it amounts to the same thing whether one gets drunk alone or is a leader of nations. If one of these activities takes precedence over the other, this will not be because of its real goal but because of the degree of consciousness which it possesses of its ideal goal; and in this case it will be the quietism of the solitary drunkard which will take precedence over the vain agitation of the leader of nations¹⁷.

The schizoid fear of isolation is expressed by the leader of nations who is agitated to remain a leader and so is involved in the outward life of others; the schizoid fear of emotional proximity is expressed in the solitary life of the drunkard, the life which Sartre here prefers even though it is, he claims, the same in structure as the personal metaphysics of the leader of nations. The preference for solitude and entrancement is characteristically schizoid. Sartre believes the two existential stances are equivalent, because neither can achieve a state of completion, a state in which no further self-

15. Douglas Kirsner, *The Schizoid World of Jean-Paul Sartre and R. D. Laing* (Queensland: The Univ. of Queensland Press, 1976). The quote comes from Harry Guntrip's *Schizoid Phenomena Object-Relations And The Self* (New York: International Univ. Press, 1969), 19.

16. Guntrip, 48.

17. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1975), 797.

development is possible. In psychological terms, the self cannot absorb all reality but it fears itself becoming absorbed; consequently, it tends toward either psychological retreat, or artistic or cultural activity in the extreme. The alternatives are exclusive; each destroys the self and thus is futile.

This sense of futility and its extreme alternatives are present in the very important ending of «The Lotos-Eaters». Before the end, the mariners express their futility: «Is there any peace / In ever climbing up the climbing wave?» (ll. 94-95). At the end of the poem the mariners liken themselves to the gods, who watch an ill-used race of men toil and go to hell or to a paradise of Elysian valleys (l. 169). Sartre describes the project of people as the struggle to become gods, and this project can result in the private hell of the drunkard, or the anxiety-ridden fate of the leader of nations. In «The Lotos-Eaters» the mariners do not want to toil like the «ill-used race of men» so that neither the hell nor Elysian valleys is one of their choices. What do they want? What choice is Tennyson suggesting a poet should make? How, if it all, is this central tension resolved?

I believe «The Lotos-Eaters» raises a deep question for a poet about the conduct of life and a quote from Merleau-Ponty will show more clearly how the final lines partially resolve the issue. When commenting on Sartre's metaphysics, he wrote that «those who wish to remain asleep will always find disagreeable» the intuition that they are always free to choose their own destiny and hence that they are always responsible¹⁸. Merleau-Ponty, in this context, states that the person who realizes the intuition can «only go forward, not backward». Merleau-Ponty believes that a person can refuse life although never completely. A sleeper is never completely isolated within himself, nor is the mental patient ever totally cut off from the inner subjective world. As he puts it, «The lunatic, behind his ravings, his obsessions and lies, knows that he is raving, that he is allowing himself to be haunted by an obsession, that he is lying, in short he is not mad, *he thinks, he is*. All is then for the best and insanity is only perversion of the will»¹⁹. Merleau-Ponty gives the example of a girl who, after being forbidden to see the young man she loves, loses her ability to speak and never does»²⁰. Merleau-Ponty, who was trained both as a philosopher and a psychologist, explains the girl's refusal of life:

In the case of the girl just discussed the move towards the future, towards the living present or towards the past, the power of learning, of maturing of entering into communication with others,

18. Kirsner, 28.

19. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* trans. Colin Smith (London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976), 125.

20. Merleau-Ponty, 160.

have become, as it were, arrested in a bodily symptom, existence is tied up and the body has become the place where life hides away²¹.

Merleau-Ponty describes «the place where life hides away» as a refusal of and a resistance to life as occurred in the novel by Gunther Grass *The Tin Drum* in which a boy refused to grow taller and to speak, ever again. Merleau-Ponty claims that a person can stop his development in life, can stop his journey onward. Tennyson would say a person can eat the lotos-fruit.

Tennyson may have been thinking about stopping his poetic journey when he wrote about «living again in memory» (l. 110). It may either mean stagnating in a life filled with ideas and attitudes already formed or developing new ones by a kind of life made anew through memory, that is, through poetic imagination. Hegel very precisely speaks about this moment in life when imagination as recollection develops the self.

Since its accomplishment consists in Spirit knowing what it is, in fully comprehending its substance, this knowledge means its concentrating itself on itself, a state in which Spirit leaves its external existence behind and gives its embodiment over to Recollection. In thus concentrating itself on itself, Spirit is engulfed in the night of its own self-consciousness; its vanished existence is, however, conserved therein; and this superseded existence — the previous state, but born anew from the womb of knowledge — is the new stage of existence, a new world, and a new embodiment or mode of Spirit²².

The development of the self, Hegel claims, requires an active recollection; in contrast Tennyson points out that by eating the lotos the mariners will forget to return, to recollect themselves in poetry. Their progress in life will become arrested.

To further understand the ending of «The Lotos-Eaters», let us remember a tale of oblivion and destiny in *The Republic*. Plato tells a tale that may be very analogous to Tennyson's overall intention in «The Lotos Eaters». The very last subject in *The Republic* is the tale of Er, a man who was stricken on the battlefield, whose soul journeyed to a place where souls chose their destinies in life, and who watched others as they drank from the River of Neglectfulness²³. Er was not compelled to drink, just as Odysseus did not in

21. Merleau-Ponty, 164.

22. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. J. B. Baillie (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 807.

23. *Great Dialogues of Plato*, trans. W. H. D. Rouse (New York: New American Library, 1956), 422.

Homer's tale. Some people drank too much and forgot that they had chosen their destiny; some drank the proper measure but chose their destinies too quickly. In the last lines of the poem, Tennyson allows the reader to choose a destiny and the role of poetry in it. In these lines the mariners have to choose: should they become an ill-used race of men through toil? Or, should they fall into the slumber of the lotos flower? They do not choose the toil, and in this way they refuse life just as Merleau-Ponty's example of the mental patient who could no longer speak. They choose the slumber of the lotos, and they seem to be resolute.

But the reader of the poem should not equate this only positive result of the indecisiveness throughout the poem with the poet's own choice, because the poet has shown the state to be a stagnation. The poet, however, need not express himself with the alternatives of toil, for they can lead to the anguish of a hell or to an unreal enchantment of an Elysian valley. If the poet were to choose the toil, this alternative is as undesirable as eating the lotos; the fact suggests that too much toil is an enchantment, a lotos-state, just as much as a slumber without poetic activity. Just as Homer did not have Odysseus eat the lotos, Tennyson left Odysseus behind and describes only the mariners as lotos-eaters. Perhaps, in this way Tennyson leaves himself behind from taking either the alternative of slumber or toil.

In answer to the critical question «Does Tennyson choose between spiritual commitment and emotional withdrawal?» I believe he asserts the need for a middle path between the dangers of slumber and the dangers of toil. Both alternatives are a lotos-life as evidenced by the affected mariners speaking of the matter in the last lines. I do not think Tennyson delineates this middle path, except negatively by rejecting what Stevenson called the Romantic «poetry of sensation». Tennyson used hyperbole to show its faults: the extreme trance of the lotos-eaters parallels the extreme sensuous rapture for nature which the Romantics felt. Therefore, «The Lotos-Eaters» has this partially negative resolution: a poet should take a middle path between the extremes of non-poetry and trance-induced toil, and between sensation without articulation and the sensuous rapture of the Romantics.

There remains the very first question about the paradox of interpretation. Is the poem «everlastingly elastic» such that no single interpretation could be the absolutely correct and complete one? If not, does it mean that the poem contains no seeds for a re-envisioning of the poetic endeavor? I reject these alternatives because they treat the poem as a non-living structure, one without a life cycle of its own. It seems that there must be such an aging mechanism in addition to a maturation process, or else even in a poet's own work there could not be continuous progress and re-birth from one poem to the next. Tennyson revised the 1832 version into a much improved version of 1842. On the most general scale, this analysis does not achieve the final interpretation for all times, as no analysis could; yet, it does begin with a

specific scholarly problem and suggests an answer: that Tennyson regards the lotos as «the place where life hides away», and that the poet must choose his destiny neither as the slumber of non-poetic activity nor as the toil of «illused men». Both alternatives are dangers of the lotos-flower. They make the mariners and us forget to return homeward, and forget to begin anew the venture of life through poetry.

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Λιάνα Σακελλίου-Schultz, *Ο Λωτός του Άλφρεντ Τέννυσον: Το μέρος που η Ζωή Κρύβεται*

Ο Άλφρεντ Τέννυσον (1809-1892) ήξερε για την «συμβολική κύηση» των μύθων και συγκεκριμένα για την άφθαρτη ελαστικότητα που χαρακτηρίζει τον Ομηρικό μύθο των Λωτοφάγων, όταν τον χρησιμοποίησε στο ομώνυμό του ποίημα.

Προσπαθώντας να εξηγήσω την ανυπαρξία κατασταλαγμένης σύγχρονης κριτικής ερμηνείας για «Τους Λωτοφάγους», επικεντρώνω την εσωτερική ένταση του ποιήματος σε ένα συντακτικά διαφορούμενο στίχο που αναφέρεται στο δέλεαρ του λωτού.

Προτείνω ότι ο λωτός και οι λωτοφάγοι εκφράζουν τις προσωπικές ανησυχίες του Τέννυσον σχετικά με την τοπογραφία της καλλιτεχνικής συνείδησης και ειδικότερα με την ανάγκη των Ρομαντικών ποιητών να δημιουργήσουν μια αισθητική πραγματικότητα για υποκατάστατο ζωής.