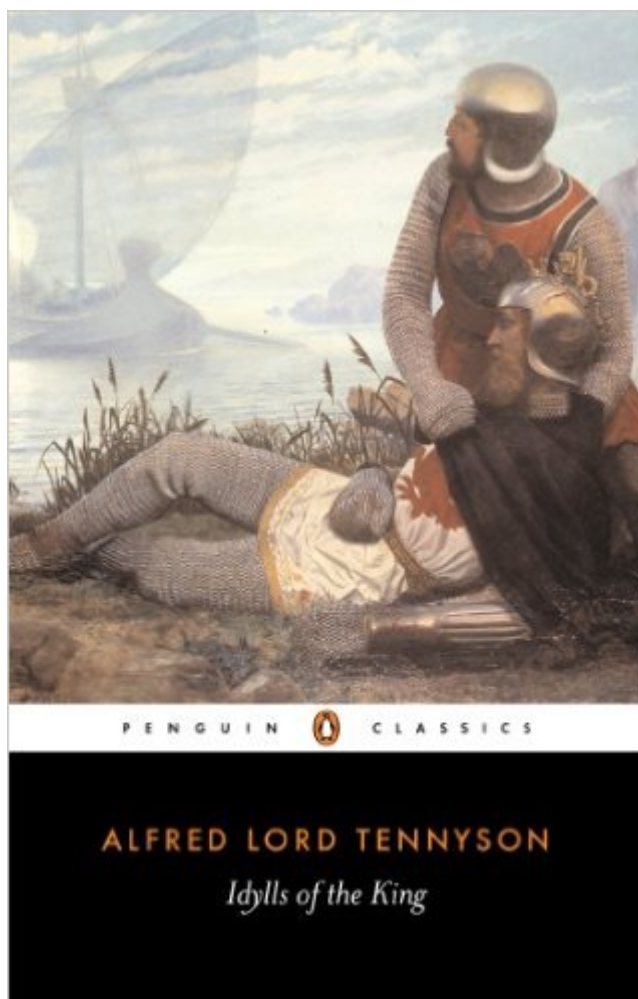


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Idylls Of The King (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

Tennyson had a life-long interest in the legend of King Arthur and after the huge success of his poem 'Morte d'Arthur' he built on the theme with this series of twelve poems, written in two periods of intense creativity over nearly twenty years. *Idylls of the King* traces the story of Arthur's rule, from his first encounter with Guinevere and the quest for the Holy Grail to the adultery of his Queen with Launcelot and the King's death in a final battle that spells the ruin of his kingdom. Told with lyrical and dreamlike eloquence, Tennyson's depiction of the Round Table reflects a longing for a past age of valour and chivalry. And in his depiction of King Arthur he created a hero imbued with the values of the Victorian age - one who embodies the highest ideals of manhood and kingship. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

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Customer Reviews

If Malory's "Le Morte D'Arthur" is the backbone of Arthurian literature, Tennyson's "Idylls" are its flesh and blood. In this extraordinary epic poem, Tennyson has transformed Malory's automatons to living and breathing characters, and infuses the legend of King Arthur with passionate intensity that had hitherto been absent. In addition to this, for the first time King Arthur's story, told in its immensity, becomes something more than a dry cataloguing of events or an excuse to have knights

and derring-do: underlying "Idylls of the King" is a vision of tragedy and destiny only vaguely hinted at in Malory. Admittedly, this is not the easiest thing in the world to read, but simply reading major parts is worth it, without necessarily following the story of Tristram or other such details. Most interesting in this poem is the relationship between Guinevere and Lancelot, which is complicated and sometimes dark. Tennyson's characters are complex beings, complete with inner shadows and desires which sometimes conflict with the ideals put forth by Arthur's "Table Round." Since it is after all Tennyson, the language is breathtaking, though one familiar with his other poetry might be slightly regretful, as I was, that it occasionally lacks the power of his other poems. Perhaps this is to be expected, given the length: and since it is Tennyson, less powerful than his other work is still marvelous. Some may be irritated by Tennyson's moralistic streak, which is hard to ignore, as well as the distinct parallels with Christianity which the poet introduces from time to time. The idea that women somehow embody all sin certainly makes an appearance here, as Guinevere is sometimes portrayed almost as evil incarnate.

Based primarily on Sir Thomas Malory's "Le Morte d'Arthur," Tennyson's "Idylls of the King" is an epic poem comprising twelve loosely connected episodes narrating the adventures and romances of the knights of Camelot. Even in the Victorian era King Arthur had a secure place in the popular imagination, so Tennyson's poem, published in sections over roughly a fifteen-year period, was warmly received. Because it is bookended by dedications to Prince Albert and Queen Victoria, whom Tennyson perhaps viewed as quasi-Arthurian figures just as Virgil exalted Augustus Caesar, it carries the authority of an accepted British cultural document. Tennyson recasts the individual stories of the knights in his own poetic vision, and in some instances invents his own anecdotes or contributes his own details, merging chivalric imagery with post-Romantic lyrical beauty. As an Arthurian medium, Tennyson's verse is much more readable than Malory's cumbersome prose (a forgivable style owing to Malory's time, but difficult to appreciate nowadays unless you have a taste for the archaic). As irresistibly dazzling as a hyperbole like "The wood is nigh as full of thieves as leaves" is, there is much more to the "Idylls" than linguistic elegance. Arthur is nearly a Christ-figure, and his knights are not unlike the apostles: "[F]ollow the Christ, the King,/Live pure, speak true, right wrong, follow the King--/Else, wherefore born?" the idealistic Gareth rhetorically asks his mother just before journeying to Camelot to fulfill his dream of joining the Round Table. Knighthood is a mission in life, a devotion to the service of God and the king (or King, to use the Christian allegory).

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