

**LOTUS-EATING IN AVONDALE: TENNYSON IN ROBIN HYDE'S POETRY  
AND 1934 AUTOBIOGRAPHY**

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To muse and brood and live again in memory,  
With those old faces of our infancy (Tennyson 'The Lotos-Eaters' 110-11).

Like a white bird, her soul is free . . . yet wise  
To choose the house of empty butterflies. (Hyde 'The Sleeping Princess' YK 134)

**Introduction: 'the place where they could think'**

In 1937, having left the convalescent ward of the Auckland Mental Hospital, Hyde looked back at her experience and wrote that she hated the effect of institutionalisation on her fellow patients at the Lodge:

the sluggish world mentality *behind* the huddle into which women patients went – recovering women, for once free of their household associations, who should have been at the most critical point in their lives, the place where they could think before they went on. (*A Home* 23-24; emphasis in original)

Hyde herself had used the place where she could think to develop a career as a professional writer, extending her published work from poetry and journalism into long prose. She was afforded an opportunity to reassess her career and a chance for a sustained period of creative writing, similar to that provided by her six-month admission to Queen Mary Hospital in Hanmer in 1927 (*Sandbrook* 7, 85). Writing *A*

*Home in this World* outside the institution in 1937 Hyde could afford to regard her treatment there as transitory and transforming.

Michele Leggott's chronological placing of Hyde's poetry in the notes to *Young Knowledge* (2003) reveals the extent to which that poetry evolved over the period 1930-1935, before and during the Lodge years, which encompassed June 1933 to March 1937. There is a detectable deepening of the spiritual or psychological consciousness in the later poetry, even when the tropes are similar to those used by Hyde earlier on. It seems likely that the Lodge respite allowed Hyde to examine her inner vision. The scrutiny to which she subjected her life in her 1934 Autobiography was crucial to this process. Written in the first three months of 1934, the Autobiography is Hyde's earliest surviving piece of sustained, realist, nakedly autobiographical writing and the first to be written after her breakdown on 2 June 1933.

Hyde produced a single text of near 40,000 words at the recommendation of her mental hospital doctor, Gilbert Tothill, who encouraged Hyde to consider submitting it for publication (Docherty 138). Clearly, Hyde regarded the work as in some sense belonging to Tothill and of potential monetary value. She bequeathed the manuscript to him, to dispose of and to use any financial benefit from, as he saw fit (Hyde 'Will'). In 1965, a year after Tothill's retirement, he gifted it to the Auckland City Library under a twenty-five year embargo (Sandbrook 384). Hyde's next project after the 1934 Autobiography was an account of her experiences as a reporter, *Journalese* (1934), which Derek Challis asserts was also undertaken at Tothill's suggestion (241). But the most significant result of the 1934 Autobiography, in terms of classic New Zealand prose, was Hyde's fictionalised autobiography *The Godwits Fly* (1938). The first catalogue entry by the Auckland City Library described the 1934 Autobiography 'as an early draft of *The Godwits Fly*' (Docherty 223). It may be that it was Tothill himself who gave it this description.

The 1934 Autobiography's address to Tothill, the 'you' of the text, is persistently personal. Hyde treated Tothill with respect for his position as the specialist who could predict her psychological outcome, but also spoke to him as an equal. She felt free to comment on the staff and on hospital procedures and treatment, and not simply as they related to herself. She shared with him her writing, her literary opinions, her

politics and her analysis of her fellow patients. So Tohill performed a mentor role, which is comparable to that which Lisa Docherty has identified as being central to Hyde's relationship with Christchurch Sun literary editor, John Schroder (xiv). Hyde corresponded with Schroder from 1927 until her death in 1939.

The topics Hyde covered in the 1934 Autobiography include her childhood and young womanhood, particularly in relation to sexual development and family dynamics; her close girlhood friendship with Gwen Hawthorn; her teenage love for Harry Sweetman; the knee injury that left her lame; a love affair, which resulted in her first pregnancy; the birth and death of her first baby and her subsequent post-natal breakdown; her work history; the conception, her pregnancy with and the birth of her second child; her use of drugs; and her suicide attempt in June 1933. Heavy emphasis is placed on the personal impact of these life events, such that the emotional topics Hyde covered can be defined as sexuality, self-identity, love, death, physical pain, motherhood, grief and mental breakdown.

The Autobiography is not a formless outpouring or confession. It is a consciously literary production in terms of its style, layout and content, divided into chapters with titles, and patterned with recurring motifs, as is *The Godwits Fly*. Although the Autobiography progresses from Hyde's childhood to her suicide attempt in 1933, the manuscript is fragmentary. It is physically incomplete in that the first chapter and part of the second are missing, and the text appears to break off at the end. Interpolations fracture the narrative. The text is shot through with threads of quotation, from Hyde's poetry and that of others, with abstract argument, with questions posed or comments made to Tohill and with description and analysis of the mental hospital and its patients. Thus it juxtaposes Hyde's present at the hospital with past experiences, creating a temporal here and there, which is punctuated by timeless abstracted or transcendent moments. It is recall shaped for her doctor, perhaps with the early intention of publication, and yet it is a text on which Hyde's biography has come to rely since the early 1990s. Many of the events of Hyde's life prior to 1934 are only told or are best detailed in the Autobiography, so that this text has become a starting point for Hyde scholars looking back into Hyde's earlier life. This point is crucial. In early 1934, Hyde looked back on her life through the lens of her breakdown in June 1933. Further, the record she made of that past in the Autobiography depended as

heavily on her literary consciousness in 1934, as it did on the emotions or images evoked during her remembrance of earlier events.

Challis has stated that Tothill wanted Hyde to ‘use writing as therapy, as a means of laying the ghosts of the past, of facing the ‘evil hour of remembrance’ by recording not only her reminiscences but her impressions of life at the Lodge and her day-to-day thoughts’ (233). The ‘evil hour of remembrance’ was Hyde’s own phrase from Chapter 9 of the 1934 Autobiography. Hyde echoed Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, in which the evil hour is that in which Eve gains knowledge:

[...] her rash hand in evil hour  
Forth reaching to the Fruit, she pluck’d, she ate:  
Earth felt the wound, and Nature from her seat  
Sighing through all her Works gave signs of woe  
That all was lost. (*Paradise Lost* IX.780-84)

Challis claims that the Autobiography functioned as ‘a private document, an exercise in catharsis, and as a guide to her psychiatrist concerning her past and present anxieties’ (234). It might also be said that through the Autobiography she came to feel again the wound of her past, to fall into the knowledge of the reality of her present and to recognise that which she had lost.

My purpose in this essay is to examine Hyde’s literary devices and themes in the 1934 Autobiography, with special reference to Tennyson’s works and in particular his poem, ‘The Lotos-Eaters’ (1842).<sup>1</sup> Kissane identifies in Tennyson’s works, including ‘The Lotos-Eaters’, characteristic aspects such as yearning or wistful longing, journeying, water imagery, the displacement of autobiography into mythology, the refashioning of myth and legend, and the themes of time and memory. All of these are characteristic of Hyde’s oeuvre. They are, of course, distinguishing marks of Romanticism and its echo in Modernism, but Hyde’s thematic similarity with Tennyson is particularly striking. My argument will be that Tennyson’s texts and his themes, in particular those encapsulated by ‘The Lotos-Eaters’, bear a direct relationship to Hyde’s conceptualisation of the course of her life and her illness as

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<sup>1</sup> Tennyson published the ‘Lotos-Eaters’ originally in 1832 and in revision in 1842. I have used the 1842 version, on the assumption that it was most probably the version with which Hyde was familiar. This and all other Tennyson texts used in this paper are quoted from the Norton edition selected by Hill, except ‘The Day-Dream’ which is quoted from the Macmillan *Works* (1902).

written into the 1934 Autobiography and her poetry, with an emphasis on that poetry written during her hospitalisation.

### **Eating the lotos day by day**

Hyde's mind in early 1934 was burdened with texts. In the 1934 Autobiography she wrote, 'Quote, quote, quote, and cry, remember scraps of books never written for "us"', where 'us' indicates that disenfranchised group, which Hyde set against the hegemony associated with hospital authority, as signified in the 1934 Autobiography by the personal pronoun 'they' (ch. 18). In the Autobiography Hyde professed to be alienated from familiar texts, but she frequently gave meaning to her memory through quotation, including from the poems of Tennyson and particularly from 'The Lotos-Eaters'. Tennyson's poem seizes on that incident in Homer's *Odyssey*, which is only told after the event by Odysseus to entertain Nausicaa's father, Alcinous, in Book 9. Odysseus related how, blown off course ten days after setting sail for Ithaca on the voyage home, he and his crew had washed up on the island inhabited by the lotus-eaters,

who had no notion of killing my companions, not at all,  
they simply gave them the lotus to taste instead ...  
Any crewmen who ate the lotus, the honey-sweet fruit,  
lost all desire to send a message back, much less return,  
their only wish to linger there with the Lotus-eaters,  
grazing on lotus, all memory of the journey home  
dissolved forever. But *I* brought them back, back  
to the hollow ships, and streaming tears – I forced them,  
hauled them under the rowing benches, lashed them fast  
and shouted out commands to my other, steady comrades:  
'Quick, no time to lose, embark in the racing ships!' –  
so none could eat the lotus, forget the voyage home.  
They swung aboard at once, they sat to the oars in ranks  
and in rhythm churned the water white with stroke on stroke.

From there we sailed on, our spirits now at a low ebb [...] (Fagles 214; emphasis in original)

Tennyson's 'Lotos-Eaters' expands two key issues in Homer's tale, that of the loss of memory and hence of will to return induced by the lotus and that of the 'streaming tears' signifying the grief engendered by the journey. Tennyson's first 45 lines comprise a narrator's description of the landing and the loss of will of Odysseus' men under the influence of the lotus. The second part of the poem is the Choric Song of those lotus-eating mariners, a song in eight stanzas and 128 lines, which explicates the effects and appeal of the lotus. The song dwarfs the brief 45 lines of action.

Odysseus's leadership and bravery is established in the very first lines of the poem: "Courage!" he said, and pointed toward the land, / "This mounting wave will roll us shoreward soon" (1-2). But he is then effaced from the poem and against his onward energy is pitched the insidious influence on his mariners of that etiolated, wraith-like native throng, which brings to them the lotus-addiction: 'And round about the keel with faces pale, / Dark faces pale against that rosy flame, / The mild-eyed melancholy Lotos-eaters came' (25-26). Here is an echo of the image of the sluggish huddle of women hospital patients so deprecated by Hyde, once she had returned to the scene of action in the outer world.

The weight of words Tennyson gave to the lotus-eating mariners and the brief appearance of Odysseus reverse the division of attention paid in Homer's epic. Tennyson's concern is the inner struggle of the lotus-eating mariners, who are weary from making 'perpetual moan, / Still from one sorrow to another thrown' (62-63). They see their fate as one of disengagement from the effortless cycles of birth and death experienced in nature, in favour of perpetual labour unto death and engagement in the 'war with evil' under the command of Odysseus (94). Their perspective apparently contradicts the Hobbesian notion that it is the *natural* life of the human being, which is 'poor, nasty, brutish and short' (qtd. in 'Hobbes'). It may actually serve to underscore Odysseus's failure to provide that secure life furnished by Hobbes's ideal sovereign state, much as governments failed to sustain their suffering populaces during the 1930s Depression. And though Odysseus intended to return them to their homes, by now, the lotus-eaters sing, it was probable that 'all had suffer'd change' and their welcome would be sorry (116). 'The Lotos-Eaters'

anticipates the changes on Ithaca that are yet to worry Odysseus at the moment of the poem, but which Tennyson's readers were likely to have known from Homer.

Forgoing their return, Tennyson's mariners are content to escape the moral struggle contingent upon their humanity:

Eating the Lotos day by day,  
To watch the crisping ripples on the beach,  
And tender curving lines of creamy spray;  
To lend our hearts and spirits wholly  
To the influence of mild-minded melancholy;  
To muse and brood and live again in memory,  
With those old faces of our infancy  
Heap'd over with a mound of grass,  
Two handfuls of white dust, shut in an urn of brass! (105-113)

The Tennysonian lotus-dream is not straightforwardly paradisiacal, but is suffused with a spirit of unease, engendered by a sense of moral turpitude. Kissane observes that 'the positive values of timelessness and a reunion with the past involve the forsaking of responsibility and an indifference to humanity' (108). That double-faced existence, the dreamy drift dogged by the current of unease, is shown in Hyde's use of lotus-dreaming, in two letters, written five and three years prior to her admission to the Auckland Mental Hospital. During a sojourn in Wellington in April 1928, she used lotus-land as a metaphor in correspondence with John Schroder, writing that 'the weather is lovely and I'm living a scandalously ideal life sitting about in the Botanical Gardens under pine trees. If this lotus eating continues I'll get fat' (Docherty 56). This letter was written just six months after Hyde's discharge from Queen Mary Hospital at Hanmer Springs, following her first breakdown. She was unable to find permanent work and was eking out a precarious living as a freelance writer. When she finally found journalistic employment on *Truth* at the end of the year, her lotus-eating ended in an office, which she described in the 1934 Autobiography as hellish (ch. 20).

Two years later in October 1930, whilst waiting in Picton for the birth of her second child, Hyde wrote to Schroder: 'after three more weeks in this lotus land (commanded by the Doc) I'm going to draw up a huge plan of campaign and work hard somehow'

(Docherty 224). Picton was not an unequivocal lotus-land. Although Hyde remembered aspects of her existence there as idyllic, Docherty notes that in Hyde's letter she 'barely communicates the desperation of her situation' (102). Hyde was struggling financially and had shortly to face childbirth followed by the need to support a baby. In the meantime, she was having difficulty finding lodgings where a heavily pregnant, unmarried woman was acceptable and she was under the stress of pretending she was on a holiday for her health at a doctor's recommendation.<sup>2</sup>

In each epistolary instance, a period of apparently idyllic, dreamy idleness is shadowed by an uneasy sense of the impingement of Hyde's lifelong struggle for money and social acceptability. Further she used the image of lotus-eating and its contingent associations to raise some defence against any criticism of her for shirking. In the first letter, by telling Schroder that her lotus-eating was 'scandalously ideal', she connoted her awareness of the indulgence inherent in the practice, simultaneously diverting attention from her unemployment. In the second letter, she was able shift the responsibility onto doctor's orders.

### **Have you finished wandering Ulysses?**

Tennyson and Hyde intersect at the *Odyssey*. The trope of the wanderer occurs throughout Hyde's body of work, appearing prior to her Lodge stay in such poems as 'The Long Journey' (YK 65), and in the quest for the legendary island paradise of Hy Brasil in 'The Old Mariners' (YK 70). Later, her most significant poetic itinerant is perhaps the prophet figure Nadath in *The Book of Nadath* (1999). But she deals directly with Odysseus in her poem 'The Wanderer', of which the first draft still extant dates to early 1934, about the time she was writing the 1934 Autobiography (YK Notes). The opening lines of the poem, spoken by Hyde's Odysseus figure, are significant: 'Come, I will tell you the truth – if the truth may be / Told by a tavern fire' (YK 111). Bernard Knox describes Odysseus as the teller of 'autobiographical fictions', 'skilfully crafted' tales, which fulfil the narrative imperative of the *Odyssey* as 'a drama of identity disguised and revealed' (61). Hyde understood the social function of masking and its role in survival. As Leggott remarks, 'Hyde is about

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<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 4 of *A Home* and Chapter 20 of the 1934 Autobiography.

hiding, about surviving by hiding' ('Opening the Archive' Part 2). In this same period in 1934, Hyde's poems 'Lotus' and 'Seduction of a Second-rate Soul' deal with masking, the former poem identifying it as a means of protecting the wounded inner self and the latter in terms of the 'mask of duty', by which socially unacceptable appetites are concealed or straitjacketed (YK 112; 116). The word 'truth' figures frequently in the 1934 Autobiography, in which Hyde claimed to Tothill that 'I pretend and pretend, to everyone but you' (ch. 22). In 'The Wanderer', the speaker invites the audience to hear the truth, but warns that it may not be forthcoming, that what might seem explicit in autobiography was not necessarily so.

Hyde's 'The Wanderer' is not a recitation of events as written in Homer's *Odyssey*. The moment of Hyde's poem appears to be that of Odysseus' return to Ithaca in Books 17 and 18. However, in the *Odyssey* the tales that Odysseus tells on his return in disguise are fabrications, whereas the tale in Hyde's narrative more nearly resembles that told by Odysseus in Homer's Book 12, drinking at court with Alcinous. Hyde's wanderer is never named, is gender ambiguous and has a particular quest, which differs from that of Homer's hero. Fagles observes that 'visions of Odysseus as the restless explorer, hungry for new worlds, have little to do with Homer's Odysseus, who wants above all things to find his way home and stay there' (25). In contrast, Hyde's wanderer quests for spiritual peace, which perhaps can be found in 'Music, beauty, the tender truths of a friend' (YK 112). Whilst hearth and home can be regained by Homer's hero, for Hyde's wanderer:

Such were the seaways. I come in a mean disguise  
Back to a world that seems but a wraith of the foam,  
Back to the laughter of alien lips and eyes —  
Where shall my heart find home?

Hyde's speaker identifies with the pessimism of Tennyson's lotus-eaters, who anticipate that

all hath suffer'd change:  
For surely now our household hearths are cold:

Our sons inherit us: our looks are strange:

And we should come like ghosts to trouble joy. (117-19)

Hyde's speaker finds his home world wraithlike, that is the spectre of death, but Tennyson's lotus-eaters imagine themselves resembling ghosts should they return home. Both poets recognise that the journey may be alienating. In Homer's account, Odysseus forces his men to leave the island and continue on the journey to Ithaca, during which all but Odysseus will perish. Tennyson ends his poem with the lotus-eaters pledging to remain on the island in a morally ambiguous torpor. Hyde's wanderer seeks Nirvana, but if that is unobtainable will resume the epic, tortuous journey with an inevitable conclusion in the sunset region, more strongly suggesting death than respite: 'I shall turn to the west, and forget. / Shipwreck and sea-voice chanting, these also must end' (YK 112). These lines evoke the final stanza of 'Three Poems', in which Hyde wrote with chilling simplicity of her room at the mental hospital: 'I should like to die in this room – / It looks towards the West' (YK 144).

Hyde's 1934 Autobiography contains her account of the wandering of Harry Sweetman, whom Hyde met in 1922 during her last year of high school. Tennyson's body of work was present later that year, in the form of a volume of his poetry, which, together with the Book of Job, was awarded to Hyde at Wellington Girls' College graduation (1934 Auto ch. 6). Hyde's affection for Harry is expressed with intensity in her writing during the period spent at Auckland Mental Hospital. In retrospect in the 1934 Autobiography, she expressed her disappointment at Sweetman travelling overseas without her in 1925 through reference to the *Odyssey*: 'My name was *not* Ariadne or Penelope, and the promise had been that we should travel together' (ch. 7; emphasis in original).

Despite Hyde's expression of resentment, Challis reports that in December 1927, she sent Sweetman a telegram asking, 'Have you finished wandering Ulysses?', only to learn from his brother that he was dead (97). Hyde's nickname for Harry, which appears throughout the 1934 Autobiography and in her unpublished 1935 Journal, is not 'Ulysses', but 'Haroun'. Hyde may not have originated the nickname, since Sweetman signed himself 'Haroun' in a undated letter written to Hyde before he went overseas (Challis 52). 'Haroun' was the name of the historical Abbasid Caliph of Baghdad, Haroun ar-Rashid (*d.* 809). In literature, his name and reputation was given

to the chief protagonist in many of the tales of the *Arabian Nights*. He was depicted as a fabulously wealthy patron and connoisseur of music and poetry, who wandered through Baghdad in disguise at night, sometimes in the company of the brilliant poet *Abū Nuwas* ('Harun ar-Rashid'). The young Tennyson featured the caliph in his poem, 'Recollections of the Arabian Nights', the stanzas of which conclude with variations on the refrain: 'For it was in the golden prime/ Of good Haroun Alraschid' (9-11). If it was Tennyson's poem which lent Sweetman the name, it is intriguing that the late Haroun/ Harry figures in Hyde's biography and then her writing in a similar way to that in which Arthur Henry Hallam was beloved friend and then subject for Tennyson. Tennyson immortalised Hallam in the long poem 'In Memoriam', after Hallam died suddenly at twenty-two, whilst holidaying in Continental Europe (Hill 118). Harry Sweetman died unexpectedly at twenty-five, whilst travelling in England.

Hyde established a pattern of drawing on Tennyson's poetry in the 1934 *Autobiography*, even to supplant texts with which she was familiar. In doing so, she was placing herself and Tothill on common literary ground, since he was likely to have been taught Tennyson at school. In Chapter 15, she configured the triangular relationship between herself, her first baby's father, Frederick de Mulford Hyde (Cedric), and his wife, Alice, using the example of one of her favourite Shakespearean subjects, the triangle formed by Cleopatra, Antony and the latter's wife Fulvia. But rather than quoting directly from Shakespeare's play, which she did in six instances in Chapters 12, 15, 18 and 20, here she used lines from Tennyson's poem 'A Dream of Fair Women':

Cedric and I never became lovers again – cela va sans dire – but I believe he was actually commanded to make me as happy as might be. In fact, I heard Alice say, 'Oh, comfort her a little.' Once she'd decided I was not a menace, she wished to be – of all things – motherly – I scarcely saw her, with my blinded eyes. But I saw this. Cedric was sternly discouraged from singing anymore. He did *not* sing very well, but he did love it, and it was in him. But she had taken him in hand now, once and for all (of course he'd owned up about his tiresome position, Robin and myself, months before.)

'Oh, you tamely died!

You should have clung to Fulvia's waist, and thrust

The dagger through her side!

In this quotation from 'A Dream of Fair Women', Cleopatra admonishes the dead Rosamund Clifford, the mistress of the British king, Henry II, for failing to revenge herself on Henry's wife, Eleanor of Aquitaine. Historical gossip has it that Eleanor murdered Rosamund. Tennyson's Cleopatra uses her rival Fulvia, the wife of Antony, to symbolise any wife in an adulterous triangle. In Hyde's 1934 Autobiography it is not clear whether she meant to reprimand herself or Cedric for failing to take action against the Fulvia figure, Cedric's wife Alice.

### **We have had enough of sorrow**

There is a significant comparison to be drawn between the experience of the lotus-eaters and that of the inmates of a mental hospital in Hyde's era. Entering the mental hospital, patients took bed rest and were shielded from contact with the outside world, if doctors deemed it to be harmful. Similarly, the lotus-eaters, overcome by life's challenges, succumbed to a simplified, contemplative existence, divorced from family and friends and companioned by solipsists. But it is a more interesting exercise to consider the association between 'The Lotus-Eaters' and Hyde's texts, by plotting her use of the poem and the ways in which her imagery connects with Tennyson's themes. The dual images to consider are those of the journey to and away from the island of the lotus-eaters and of its antithesis, the stasis on the island. These images have a deep resonance with Hyde's conception of her route to inner peace, of her escape from reality and of mental illness. Also of significance is the notion of lotus-eating as a respite from suffering, from a struggle that is a moral duty and from the rigours of active life. Finally, a theme which finds multiple connections in Hyde's work is Tennyson's image of lotus-eating as contemplation, which can be aesthetic or can be a means of regaining a past life and re-encountering, in ideal circumstances, those who in 'real' time are dead or alienated. These themes are interconnected in Hyde's texts and cannot be considered singly, as the discussion will show.

The struggle rejected by the lotus-eaters in Tennyson's poem was for Hyde the voyage through the sea of poverty, as she experienced it throughout her working life, in and out of lodgings, such as the 'dishevelled house' where she boarded in

Wanganui in 1929-30:

where there were noisy children and a noisier lodger who was always drunk,  
and always trying to make love to me.

This drunken and rather ugly individual, (he was quarrelsome, as well  
as much too affectionate,) once started to ramble on about poetry. Said he, out  
of a clear sky,

‘Let us alone. We have had enough of sorrow,  
For ever climbing up the climbing wave.’ (1934 Auto ch. 19)

These lines are echoed frequently in Hyde’s poetry. The meaning is heard in the  
opening line of ‘The Sleeping Princess’: ‘I have been sane too long . . .’ (YK 134).  
Meaning and form resonate in the opening line of ‘The Haunted House’, a poem  
which draws on a conceit used by Tennyson in his poem ‘The Deserted House’ (1830)  
and which deals with the rejection of morbid recollection: ‘We have been sad too  
long. Close up this desolate house. . .’ (YK 109). The echo in Hyde’s quotation of  
‘The Lotos-Eaters’ is partly explained by the fact that those ‘Tennysonian’ lines were  
actually shaped by Hyde. She compressed Tennyson’s themes from the second and  
fourth stanzas of the Choric Song, plucking the word ‘sorrow’ from the second and  
adding it to her reworking of these lines from the fourth:

Let us alone. What pleasure can we have  
To war with evil? Is there any peace  
In ever climbing up the climbing wave?  
All things have rest, and ripen toward the grave  
In silence – ripen, fall, and cease:  
Give us long rest or death, dark death, or dreamful ease. (93-98)

The Choric Song is structured on alternating stanza themes of ‘here’ and ‘there’,  
where ‘here’ is on the island of the Lotus-Eaters and ‘there’ is in the eternal repetitive  
struggle represented by the boat ploughing through the ocean waves. The deictic  
indicators centralise the island idyll. The ‘here and now’ of Tennyson’s lotus island  
lends it immediacy and a sense of reality.

Hyde used a similar technique in her unpublished play 'Eurydice'. The play is a lightly veiled autobiographical piece written after her suicide attempt on 2 June 1933, but prior to the 1934 Autobiography, with which it is textually intimately linked (Leggott Introduction 3-4). 'Eurydice' opens in a paradisiacal setting where its female protagonist Lally socialises with close family members. Later in the play Lally swims back through the 'Sea of Time' to the converse of Paradise, to a 'there', which transpires to be a hospital ward where she is recovering from attempted suicide by drowning. The initial scenes are revealed to be illusory and surreal. Lally must resume her mourning for the deaths of those immediate family members she encountered in the opening scenes, including her stillborn baby. The pattern of traversing the sea to a world of fantasy is not the only connection between Tennyson's poetry and Hyde's play. In Scene 1, Lally's dead sister Louise sings a misquoted version of Tennyson's 'Sweet and Low' (1850) ('Eurydice' 5). In Scene 3, just before Lally swims back to the world of the living, Louise revives from her melancholy at being separated from her still living husband and child, and announces that she is:

tired of *being* tired. How does it go?

'Let us alone. We have had enough of sorrow,  
For ever climbing up the climbing wave.'

In her letters and autobiographical writing Hyde used tiredness not only in its literal physical sense and in the sense of world-weariness, but also as a symptom of and euphemism for depression and other mental illness in herself as well as in others.<sup>3</sup> Here in 'Eurydice' she connects finding relief from that weariness with the need to withdraw from the sorrowful living world.

The second stanza of the Choric Song in 'Lotos-Eaters' addresses the real world of grief faced by Lally and asks

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 (60-63)

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, letters to John Schroder written on 12 December 1933 and in March 1935 (Docherty 134, 153). In *A Home in This World*, Hyde recalled the period before her suicide attempt and asked: 'Which came first, taking drugs, or being so deadly tired and knowing a crash is straight ahead?' (99).

The third stanza returns to lotus-land, wherein nature's eternal cycles of growth, ripening, falling of fruit and re-seeding are peaceful and without struggle, but yet of sickly richness, 'waxing over-mellow' (78). The fourth stanza readdresses human toil and calls for a return to a prelapsarian condition, which surrenders to the pattern of natural, fecund cycles, and wherein peace is achieved by forgoing the intellectualised human struggle towards moral and ethical ends.

It is through 'The Lotos-Eaters' that Hyde connected, in literary and experiential terms, with the distasteful lodger. In the Author's Note to Hyde's 1938 novel *Nor the Years Condemn*, she wrote that her intention had been to convey a sense of the reality of 'the 'boom and bust' period in New Zealand' and to tell of 'the types of people who were caught up in a mounting wave' and then 'sank down into its pit'. Those types must include Hyde herself, her fellow patients at the Auckland Mental Hospital and the lodger in Wanganui, who it appears had lacked the energy to struggle up again. Hyde recalled the oddity of 'finding "The Lotus-Eaters" in such a place', that is, in that boarding house and in the mind of the lodger: 'I don't mind a bit about the "so much good in the worst of us," (pays to be good, usually,) but this yet living perception of beauty, stifled in a fat drunken body?' (1934 *Auto* ch. 19). She continued:

Oh, of course, I did try a little priggish reclamation work, but I am no success as a reclamer: because I have never been able to say

'I, Galahad, also saw the grail  
Descending as a flame upon the shrine.  
I saw the fiery face as of a child  
That smote itself into the bread, and went.'

Again Hyde mediated an iconic story, this time Arthurian, through the comfortable, memorable form of Tennyson's verse, quoting slightly inaccurately from 'The Holy Grail' in *Idylls of the King*. The *Idylls* sequence uses a metaphor that is central to the next section of my discussion. It is Avilion, the Island of Blessed Souls, Celtic counterpart to Hy-Brasil in its conception as 'an earthly paradise in the Western Seas' (Hill 429, n.9). In 'The Passing of Arthur', the dying king is placed in a barge and at 'the verge of dawn' sails, as Arthur foretells it:

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  
And bowery hollows crown'd with summer sea,  
Where I will heal of my grievous wound.' (426-32)

### **To the island**

Throughout Hyde's writing, including the 1934 Autobiography, she repeatedly used a metaphor connected to the 'Lotos-Eaters' and to Homer's *Odyssey*, in which a journey is made through or over water. In Hyde's texts the traveller fails to reach home, but instead encounters death or dreaming, or both. The image bears an obvious link to Hyde's attempt to drown herself in 1933. Hyde's textual water-journeys are often to a timeless world, a Hy-Brasil or land of the Hyperboreans, in which the dead are encountered and from which a return is possible. The Odyssean comparison is the voyage to consult the shades in Book XI, although Hyde's other world is not usually hellish. A paradisiacal antecedent to such instances in the 1934 Autobiography is found in Hyde's unpublished play 'Eurydice'. The myth of Orpheus and Eurydice is the tragedy of the poet's struggle to recover his loved one or soul mate from the Underworld, just as the poet Hyde used text, in 'Eurydice' and elsewhere, to recover her first baby and Harry Sweetman, both of whom died in 1926. The image of finding life in death is heard in Hyde's description of her suicide attempt, in which she 'breathed in water as if it were life, not death' (1934 Auto ch. 23).

Hyde's often uneasy and illusory, fantasy island idylls and refuges are frequently connected with infants. The most sustained instance in her prose writing is the island in *Wednesday's Children* (1937), where Wednesday lives with her imaginary offspring. In the 1934 Autobiography, Hyde described for Tothill a particularly significant recurring dream, one which expressed an escape from physicality into a happier, supernatural state. In the dream, Hyde said she would walk and talk and was very active, though not 'with the strained fantastic activity of the dreams which were my escape from lameness' (ch. 8). Revealingly, Hyde's family regarded this dream as

an evil omen, whilst Hyde wrote: 'It's the utter unearthliness of the place, and its happiness, that I love so much'. She could experience a simulacrum of that happiness through a willed day-dream, which did have hellish, nightmare aspects:

when I was ill seven years ago, I could daydream a sort of replica of it, and by running very quickly, find Robin, who was dead. That was very different – a conscious effort, to be made when I was wide awake, and to be paid for by the horrible shadows which beset the still waking, but overtaxed mind. (These shadows were just beginning to return to me, when I came here for the second time.)

You'd think it easy enough to manage a protection of one's own image, over the tiniest of frail white criss-cross bridges. But it wasn't. The *ground* – there never seemed to be any stream – used to swirl up in brown waves, and run how I would, I could never escape its difficulties – but I used to find Robin, and hold him as they would not let me, even for one minute, on earth.

Yes, I know quite well that all *that* was 'wish-fulfilment,' and that the aftermath of terror, which has never quite gone away, was merely the effect of a mental strain self-imposed. But I was ready to do that. (ch. 8; emphasis in original)

Compare Hyde's dream struggle to rescue Robin with her reference to another water journey to rescue a baby, which she recommended to Tothill as the antidote to her depressed complaints to him in the Autobiography:

Do you know Kenneth Grahame's 'Wind in the Willows?' If you do, I wish you'd drop this chronicle of a black day – if you haven't already – and read instead about the purple loose strife and the island where Ratty and Moly found the baby otter, safe in Pan's keeping – I'm going to close my eyes and try to remember the thrush and nothing whatsoever else. (ch. 20)

This episode from Grahame's 1908 classic provides an interesting point of comparison with Hyde's dream imagery, Tennyson's 'Lotus-Eaters' and Homer's *Odyssey*. The adventurous Water Rat and the home-loving Mole quest for the lost baby otter on the 'holy' island of the Rat's 'song-dream' (Grahame 165). They are

enchanted by music heard from afar, which Rat says rouses ‘a longing in me that is pain’ (162). The animals row across water that is troubled ‘with twirling eddies and floating foam-streaks’ to reach an island, which is a natural paradise, a Hy-Brasil pervaded by the sense of a divine presence (164). The moment is dawn, which (like twilight, spring and autumn) performs always as a visionary, liminal moment in Hyde’s poetry, as it did for Tennyson in ‘The Passing of Arthur’ and as it did for Grahame, who entitled this chapter in his book, ‘The Piper at the Gates of Dawn’. Grahame’s awestruck animals look into the eyes of Pan, here the ultimate nature-god, ‘Helper and Friend’, for whom Rat feels an ‘unutterable love’ (167). Between Pan’s hooves is nestled the animals’ holy grail, the baby otter, a symbol of innocence and potentiality. As a blinding sun rises, Pan vanishes and the animals experience an anguished sense of loss, but:

a capricious little breeze [...] blew lightly and caressingly in their faces, and with its soft touch came instant oblivion. For this is the last best gift that the kindly demigod is careful to bestow on those to whom he has revealed himself in their helping: the gift of forgetfulness. Lest the awful remembrance should remain and grow, and overshadow mirth and pleasure, and the great haunting memory should spoil all the after-lives of little animals helped out of difficulties, in order that they should be as happy and light-hearted as before.  
(168)

### **Dream, held hazardously**

The peacefulness of oblivion and relief from great haunting memories were objects of desire for Hyde, but she lacked Grahame’s ‘kindly demigod’ (165). She did find some measure of calm in poetry. Tennyson’s ‘The Lotos-Eaters’ first appears in Hyde’s 1934 Autobiography as a comment on the soothing nature of Goethe’s song ‘The Same’:

‘Hardly a sound . . .  
The birds are asleep in the wood.  
Soon, so soon,

You shall sleep too.’<sup>4</sup>

That’s Goethe. Isn’t it a blessing in words – ‘tired eyelids, upon tired eyes?’  
(ch. 8)

Hyde alludes to the music described by Tennyson’s lotus-eaters:

There is sweet music here that softer falls  
Than petals from blown roses on the grass,  
Or night-dews on still waters between walls  
Of shadowy granite, in a gleaming pass;  
Music that gentlier on the spirit lies,  
Than tir'd eyelids upon tir'd eyes;  
Music that brings sweet sleep down from the blissful skies. (46-52)

Chapter 8 of the Autobiography was written on an evening when Hyde was tired and could not escape the voices of patients on the sleeping porch outside her room.<sup>5</sup> Of the darkly silent, underground river through the Waitomo caves, south of Auckland, she wrote to Tothill in the 1934 Autobiography: ‘If you are ever so tired that voices cut into your brain, and what they say into the inmost solitude you have won, go there, and let Charon ferry you down the Styx’ (ch. 8). Her longing was for a deathly peacefulness, where in her texts she associated death with sleep, either natural or drugged, and also with dreaming. The suspension of active or fully conscious life was thus a multi-faceted experience, sometimes comparable to a lotus-dream.

Hyde’s hazardously held dreams were creative as well as escapist. She included ‘Griefs’ in a series of epigrams, dated to 1935-36:

I have known griefs  
No more than three –  
Tooth aching,  
Child-bearing,  
And the voice breaking  
Those silent frontiers  
Of dream, held hazardously. (Hyde *YK* 216)

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<sup>4</sup> I have been unable to identify Hyde’s source.

<sup>5</sup> See Hunt for photographs of Hyde’s window and the sleeping porch at the Lodge, as they exist today (Images 3, 4 and 5).

Hyde's use of 'grief' equates physical hurt with mental agony, such that 'Child-bearing' alludes not only to labour pains, but also to the heartache that children can inflict on parents, and tooth-ache is comparable to the anguish occasioned by a dream extinguished. The poem implies that injury to mind and body are linked and equally serious. Hyde typed 'Griefs' on the same page as 'Loudspeaker', an epigram which raises the spectre of the gramophone in the Lodge sitting-room, which blared at the women 'like a man who keeps on talking and talking to his wife in a parade-ground voice' (*YK Notes; A Home 5*):

Better a tent of skins, a coracle,  
A beaver's house that listens to reeds,  
Than the vast gobbings of this oracle  
That on the cud of nothing chews and feeds. (*YK 217*)

In addition to external silence, Hyde sought the perfect annihilation of thought, lamenting to Tothill in the 1934 Autobiography:

I speak to you now as one appealing to your own special knowledge. Isn't there any escape from these maddening littlenesses? It's all very fine for me to quote and poetise, but I never have taken any drug or anaesthetic for years, without praying that 'Blackout' will stay 'Blackout.' To remember one thing should be little or nothing. But to fritter one's mind away on all these trifles and worse trifles, the most haunting any experienced person could pray against! (ch. 18)

Hyde was given a place of escape at the mental hospital, her own patch of garden, which her case notes record that she was cultivating as early as 3 February 1934 (qtd. in Challis 233). The garden was immensely important to her and remained so even after she had left the Lodge. On 29 May 1937, two months after her discharge, she wrote to the parliamentarian John A. Lee:

last time I went out, my little garden though well planted with daffs and other virtues was all weeds and wet, and I got down to the place where the large cream-flowered magnolia tree always extended its benevolence, and just howled. At first, when nobody thought I'd ever be normal again (nor am I), I

did love that place, which is a loneliness threaded with birds, overgrown, wild, scented. Nobody came there. (Docherty 243)

Of Tennyson, Grob wrote that the coastal setting of 'The Lotos-Eaters':

serves to establish one of the most basic and highly charged of Tennysonian motifs, the voyage and island or garden antithesis, which appears in his work as early as *The Sea-Fairies* of 1830. The island or garden in Tennyson is, of course, almost invariably a place of retreat from the ordinary activities and concerns of men. (119)

The positive meanings of island sanctuary and its idyllic counterpart, the garden, are fused poetically by Hyde in the section 'The House of Woman' from her long poem *The Book of Nadath*:

The olives and the cress, the irises, the lilies that go forth like boys with silver bugles, and the little flowers also, that browse in the grass like goats,

Nadath is planting them in her places: a garden, a garden and a garden, three spaces held between the seas. (14)

Olives for peace, olives and cress for sustenance with roots in the classical world, irises for Iris Wilkinson, the lilies with their dual characteristics of purity and passion, and little infant flowers, all in the triple garden of New Zealand, the garden of the woman's house. And for lilies read narcissi, gathered by Persephone at the moment when Hades took her to the underworld, and lotus, not the jujube-tree or *Zizyphus lotus* thought to be the source of the legendary narcotic of the lotophagi, but the *Nymphæa lotus* and other species, and *Nelumbium speciosum*, the water-lilies that are the Egyptian and Asian lotus ('Lotus'). The water-lily rises from darkness, from muddy water and the spiritual underground, as a symbol of purity and enlightenment of the soul. In her Lodge garden, Hyde gained a space for contemplation, the echoes of which are particularly evident in an outpouring of 'garden poems', such as 'Embrace', 'Day in a Garden' and 'No heart cares, honey-bee' (YK 124, 144, 167). Add to this list 'So therefore', which is set in a meadow rather than a garden, but is not necessarily divorced from the hospital, which stood in farmland worked by the patients. The opening words of the poem, which exists only as a draft fragment, are

‘So therefore’, a hanging conjunction indicating a logical progression into a metaphysical meditation, in which the act of contemplation itself is examined and analysed (YK 128). The second stanza of the poem is a formula for bringing the intellect to bear on the external world, in order to discover ‘the systems of birth and dying’:

This is best done with eyes closed. Through the shut eyelids  
Pour the two lights, one from the inner being,  
And through pine-boughs and lashes, the arc of that startling sun,  
Scarlet and white and topaz – demanding seeing

To be disbelieved . . . the whirl of the light rays’ pattern  
Danced in the air, seeming to thrill the slow flowers  
Into symphony. A bird mimed in tune. A cloud moved.  
Earth turned beneath him.

The ‘him’ of the poem is a boy, lying in a meadow. Subtly, the poem undercuts its initial overt claim to rationality and privileges conceptualisation arising from sensation. The boy recognises an essential harmonic motion of energy in nature, which he feels (rather than reasons) depends for its development on solitariness. In private, beauty can blossom and the ‘heart of this stone’ can move. The boy guesses that ‘some reserve / Between man and nature’ has curtailed the human relationship with the natural life forces, but, since ‘men though well clad / In thoughts and houses, are not exempt from such laws’, the poem implies that, left alone in a natural environment with space and time to think, human beings can also grow in beauty and their stone hearts, the seat of their emotions, can be moved.

This is no simple lotus eating, that which occasions, as Tennyson describes it, ‘mild-minded melancholy’ (‘Lotos-Eaters’ 109). Melancholy in Tennyson’s sense can safely be defined along Romantic lines as ‘Tender, sentimental, or reflective sadness; sadness giving rise to or considered as a subject for poetry, sentimental reflection, etc., or as a source of aesthetic pleasure’ (OED). The boy in Hyde’s poem is indeed ‘left alone sighing’, thinking on beauty, but the poem’s ideology disagrees with that of Tennyson’s lotus-island, where:

knowledge is compounded wholly of sensation and where ethical absolutes are no longer valid, but where significant experience is still possible through awareness of the beauty that is given off by a process that is itself without purpose or meaning. (Grob 125)

Hyde's boy moves beyond a surrender to sensation, moves through an awareness of beauty into the initial stages of a sense of purpose or meaning for humanity arising from the individual's process of contemplation. He is not 'complacent in stasis, refusing corrective insights, like Tennyson's Lotos Eaters disengaged in cool aestheticism' (Brunner 49). In Grob's opinion, Tennyson recognised that the lotus-eaters 'deserve censure because moral detachment in their cases serves no creative need' (129). In other words, Tennyson's ethical framework is one in which a creative outcome can justify moral detachment or vacancy. But Hyde's poem 'So therefore' manages to meld art and social responsibility. It implies that the life force which produces beauty is a universal harmonic principle, with which human beings need to engage to realise their capacity to feel emotion. The social result is an entry or re-entry into natural cycles of birth and death, and movement in tune with the natural world, that movement which is described in the poem as 'dance and song'. As Hyde conceives it, the process of contemplation of natural beauty inspires socially cohesive emotions as well as art and gives order to the human world in which the artist participates.

### **I have been sane too long**

The critic Robert Hill writes of Tennyson's poetry that it inevitably leads the reader 'to question the source of the tension between conflicting impulses which prevails in nearly every subject he seriously addressed' (610). As an example, Hill claims that whereas Tennyson 'was impelled, like his own Ulysses "to strive, to seek, to find and not to yield," he was similarly drawn toward a life of Wordsworthian seclusion – perhaps even to the indolent, mindless ease of the lotos-eater' (610). In Hyde's texts, such contradictory impulses create a schism of desire, which drives poems such as 'Lotus', in which the speaker asks of her courage:

When that your peace is pelted by petal and rain,

Say, will you waken again,  
Bearing your very lotus into the fray  
That has been less by one for many a day?  
Mock for mock . . . aye, lay them your lotus down.  
Turning your face to Terror: 'Lady, your crown.'  
Or will you lie in the flowers where no men pass,  
Lulled by their silvery whisper: 'Flesh unto grass'? (YK 113)

The lotus flower here is the banner of courage, the water-lily as symbol of enlightenment and purity, but also the *Zizyphus lotus* that lulls with a 'silvery whisper'. The dilemma, then, is when and how to quit the lotus-dreaming and return to the moral fight, taking up again the 'blue armour gone to rust' ('Joan of Arc' YK 113). The theme occurs again, in 'Escape':

I shall awaken, indeed, and my sword be bright for that fray —  
But now for a space of dreaming, the cool boughs draw me apart  
And very still is the dusk; for Wisdom hath little to say. (YK 124)

Hyde knew from early on in her mental hospital treatment that this conundrum was the crux of institutionalisation. Sometime in the first half of 1934, she wrote a letter to John Schroder, which illustrates her awareness of the abdication of moral and social duties that institutionalisation might entail and a sense of guilt at focussing on her own mental health: 'I don't know what a perpetual state of being treated as Lady of Shalott no. 2 might mean. Negation and selfishness in the end?' (Docherty 137). She had conceptualised her position at the Lodge in terms of that most romantic of icons and the most famous of Tennyson's women in towers, 'The Lady of Shalott' (1832/1842). As Leggott has pointed out, Hyde supplied the back story to Tennyson's tale in her poem 'She of Shalott' (YK 102; Notes). Tennyson presented a heroic story of the Lady drawn into life and consequently death for love of the bold Sir Lancelot. Hill regards the poem as functioning similarly to 'The Lotos-Eaters' in exploring the dangers inherent in adopting the position of the 'retired aesthete enjoying art for its own sake' (61). In contrast, Hyde's poem only makes a gesture towards the ultimate fate of the Lady of Shalott, closing on Lancelot riding 'out from the gates, on a road of doom, / And her ghostly flowers dance on her magic loom.' Hyde was more

interested in a close examination of the condition and nature of the woman herself. Her Lady of Shalott is a Persephone figure associated with jonquils and living in perpetual twilight, always at that threshold moment. Her room is 'blue-veiled', the colour used by Hyde to signify inner vision or dream and which she said represented 'mental happiness' (Docherty 134). Further, Hyde situates the Lady in a world that is figuratively drowned: 'She of Shalott moved ever through rippling twilight, / On worn gold carpets like mosses under the waters' (YK 102).

An enchanted stasis and a drowning also feature in Hyde's depiction of the effects of institutionalisation in a convent, in her poem 'The Escapee':

Body on ice, soul faintly enwreathed with flowers,  
Rather like something in a morgue. Their cool  
Enchanted peace did drown me, you know, a pool  
Of silver-dusted willows, ice-skimmed hours. (YK 100)

Institutionalisation is a drowning, the soul is wreathed with flowers as in death. Peace is achieved at the cost of death and peace belongs to 'them', the keepers of the institution who hold the woman subject. Hyde's escapee cannot leave the institution for good. The speaker's voice is supplanted in the final couplet of the poem by a fragmented chatter: 'That little fool . . . they'll get her, they always do . . . / Or she'll creep back herself . . . and grateful, too' (100). The power structure and the representation of gossipy community in 'The Escapee' relate to Hyde's description of an incident at the Lodge recorded in Chapter 18 of the 1934 Autobiography:

A girl has just come back after running away to see her mother, and there's nothing but talk of it. 'She came in as happy as anything!' 'She wants to go away with her mother!' 'Oh, isn't she silly, she'll have to stay so much longer now!' 'I hope they won't move her, but I suppose they will.' 'They always take it out of you for that – they think you're not quite sensible or you'd wait!' 'She was going home so soon! I'm sorry for her!'

Hyde described the runaway as solipsistic: 'That girl who ran away walked smiling to herself through the garden – I tried to smile at her, to speak to her – I don't think she even saw me' (ch.18). That solipsism might have been symptomatic of either the girl's mental illness or her institutionalisation or of both and it apparently could not be

broken by Hyde's external agency. That is, unlike Lancelot's image acting on the Lady of Shalott, Hyde could not induce the girl to break the spell.

A mental stasis also imprisons the speaker in 'Astolat', Hyde's treatment of the Arthurian tale of Elaine of Astolat and Lancelot.<sup>6</sup> In 'Astolat' the passive woman is near masochistic in her unhappy subservience to the active man, who is the sole determinant of her state of being:

I am weary of listening for a sound on the stair,  
For a step without, and a man's voice, steadfast and low;  
No man does well to conquer a woman so  
That blind and still she waits for him, russet hair  
Spread in defeated glory over the white  
Pillows from which she dare not lift her head;  
Stilled is the room; for the tide of her being is fled  
To ebb unseen round his going, come day, come night. (YK 142)

The woman in Hyde's 'Astolat' dreams of a heroic gesture or journey which will unite her in some form of relationship with the man she awaits, but she cannot realise self-determination and finally remains defeated: 'her head sinks down, like a russet flag brought low' (YK 143).

At the mental hospital, Hyde's tower was the Lodge, a place of confinement and subjectivity, but also a space in which she could take refuge from the mental stress of working as a journalist. Such a retreat is described by the speaker in Hyde's poem 'The Sleeping Princess':

I have been sane too long ... too long have scrambled  
The little horn-locked paths of knowledge and reason,  
Or lifted bleeding hands from the close-brambled  
Woods of pure fact, where there is darkness wholly. (YK 134)

Hyde represented the ultimate futility of grappling with fact and logic through the images of caught horns, suggesting aggression, struggle and even devilry, and of a

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<sup>6</sup> Tennyson retold the Arthurian legend in his poem 'Lancelot and Elaine' (1859), but claimed that 'The Lady of Shalott' drew on a distinct source and was written before he had read Malory's version of Lancelot and Elaine's romance (Hill 13, n. 3).

thorny hedge borrowed from the fairytale of ‘Sleeping Beauty’. The poem rejects the mode of thought of rational philosophers and the style of expression required most often of journalists. It connects with the thesis in ‘So, therefore’ that intellectualism is not enough and that imagination and sensation are requisite for psychological completeness and fulfilment of the individual as a social human being.

The speaker in ‘The Sleeping Princess’ recognises and rejects the organised intellect, which is a socially accepted marker of sanity. Writing to the politician John A. Lee in April 1936, Hyde again used brambles and horns metaphorically in an explanation of her attitudes towards mental illness and society:

No, I don’t much mind being thought mad, or even being a little mad, as you say. It might produce something decent in the way of a book. But I mind two things like Hell — lacking self-control, which makes me apt to talk and act like a sentimental fool, and the *minor* neurosis which is no longer a way of escape, but a way of thorns. *Sounds* crashing like great steel beasts in a jungle, after a year and a half when I never even heard them; and voices that seem to take on faces, they’re so silly, so herd-like, so much the law of hoof and prodding horn. Yet at times the sheer pathos of them gets through and you forget your neurotic self and grovel in the dust thinking that unless there is justice for them, there can’t be any kingdom of man or God. (Docherty 202, emphases in original)

Nearly three years after her suicide attempt, the ‘escape’ into ‘minor’ mental illness and out of the journalistic profession had become itself ‘a way of thorns’. Hyde recognised madness in its popular conception as signifying difference and perhaps creative originality. This coheres with her construction of sanity in ‘The Sleeping Princess’. However, her inability to always present herself as controlled and unsentimental was upsetting to her, as was her clinically defined condition of neurosis, which apparently depended on her sensitivity to noise and human contact. By this time, Hyde had day parole and was working as a freelance journalist. Emerging from her stasis and into the world outside the Lodge required Hyde to endure the contact with and negotiate the laws of the wider community. She experienced conflicting impulses towards retreat and towards acting on her sense of social responsibility. Hyde’s epistolary relationship with Lee was to a great extent

concerned with socialist imperatives, that is, with the kind of moral fight shrugged off by the lotus-eaters. But in 'So therefore' it was not rationality that engendered a sense of true community, but a visionary engagement with the natural world, which moved the individual to a love of humanity. In 'The Sleeping Princess', Hyde's speaker turns away from the sane and rational, because it is not the means to the desired, healing, inner vision:

Not thus shall I see the white fawn's silver flanks  
(And he a prince) couched by the river-banks,  
And to approach with such mean light were treason  
The ring of the white roses, hushed and holy,  
The shadowy palace of the falling leaves,  
Where still my Princess sleeps, nor dreams, nor grieves.

Like a white bird, her soul is free . . . yet wise  
To choose the house of empty butterflies.  
Her sleeping lips have not forgot their pride –  
How should a prince desert his legend bride?  
Though he must come through all the strife and tears  
The world shall give him, in a thousand years –  
Sorrow and mock and stress his bridal-gift,  
Ere yet he shall the white-rose curtain lift,  
Finding peace at last. Ah, let him well believe  
In troll or dwarf or witch upon the eave,  
He who has dwelt with men a little while,  
And learned their hearts, and has not learned to smile  
Let him but once his wandering footstep press  
Into the cool green moss of quietness –  
Let him but once, at noon-gold, wake her heart –  
The silvery silence of a thing apart.

The prince's objective is to achieve peace by completing his quest for love, but allusions in the second stanza open the poem out to interpretations beyond the straightforward analogy with fairy tale. The conjunction of 'soul' and 'butterflies' in

the poem signifies an allusion to Psyche. In Apuleius' tale, the trials of the beautiful mortal Psyche culminate in her being cast into an endless slumber, in an echo of the fairytale of Sleeping Beauty. Psyche is rescued by Cupid, whose faithful love for her impresses Zeus so strongly that he permits Cupid to wake Psyche, marry her and elevate her to the divine. The union is thereby purified and immortality is granted to Psyche, that is, to the soul. Love redeems the lost soul.

Hyde's poem is dense and difficult, but it seems to me that it can be read as a rejection of a rational and logocentric manner of existence, in favour of a visionary and healing perception of the self. Such a reading explains the slippage in the first stanza between the speaker, who quests for the imaginary, and the prince, who seeks 'my Princess'. The possessive pronoun claims the Princess for the speaker, that is, both prince and speaker struggle with a thorny barrier in a quest for the redemption of the soul by love. If both prince and Princess can be seen as in some sense characteristic of the speaker, then aspects of the inner being of the speaker are represented by the active and passive principles of prince and Princess. The divine union is the process of psychic healing of the self through love. And this healing has a Christian spiritual dimension. The white rose symbolism and the substitution of a thousand-year quest for the traditional hundred-year slumber in the fairy tale enables a reading in which the wandering prince is a Messiah figure and the divine union is a millennial marriage with Christ.

'The Sleeping Princess' is coincident in theme with Tennyson's 'The Sleeping Beauty' (1830/ 1842). The link is cemented by the echo of Tennyson's lines, 'She sleeps, nor dreams, but ever dwells / A perfect form in perfect rest' (99-100) in Hyde's line, 'Where still my Princess sleeps, nor dreams, nor grieves'. 'The Sleeping Beauty' is the early poem around which Tennyson built his poem sequence 'The Day-Dream' (1842). The sequence consists of nine poems, five of which comprise the fairy tale narrative, framed by the poems 'Prologue' initiating the sequence and 'Moral', 'L'Envoi' and 'Epilogue' at the conclusion. In 'Prologue', the poem's narrator tells his sweetheart Lady Flora that he has had a vision whilst she slept. That vision is the fairy tale of 'Sleeping Beauty', which he proceeds to relate in the next five poems. He questions when the sleeping palace will awake:

When will the hundred summers die,  
    And thought and time be born again,  
And newer knowledge, drawing nigh,  
    Bring truth that sways the soul of men?  
Here all things in their place remain,  
    As all were order'd, ages since.  
Come, Care and Pleasure, Hope and Pain,  
    And bring the fated fairy Prince. (69-76)

When the Prince awakens his Princess and her subjects, a new era of 'Care and Pleasure, Hope and Pain' will disturb the frozen order of the palace. Whilst Tennyson's sequence can be read as a broad meditation on social historical change, specifically anchored to his era, the motif of the pain and pleasure consequent on re-entry into life's round evokes the themes of 'The Lady of Shalott' and 'The Lotos-Eaters'. Later in the sequence, in the poem 'Moral', the speaker questions the necessity for morality in art. He argues that meaning is a matter for individual interpretation and that beauty is a quality apart from morality: 'So 'twere to cramp its use, if I / Should hook it to some useful end' (211-12). The tangled debate about pleasure, meaning and morality in poetry frames the Sleeping Beauty story, the poem's conclusion being that the speaker has created a delight for his lover, in which she can see beauty or read meaning as she pleases. Tennyson playfully treads the ground of 'The Lotos-Eaters', refusing to champion either morality or aestheticism, instead challenging the reader to find in the sequence 'A meaning suited to his mind' (200). The ultimate concerns of Hyde and Tennyson in their treatments of Sleeping Beauty are contradictory. Tennyson's 'The Day-Dream' is largely preoccupied with a philosophical debate about aesthetics and ethics, whilst Hyde's poem focuses on the psyche or the soul. Hyde pulls the Sleeping Beauty out of Tennyson's generalised arena and shifted her into the twentieth century territory of individual psychology.

It is clear that Hyde entered the space of dreaming afforded by the mental hospital with a mind full of familiar texts, including those of Tennyson. Particularly in the early stages of her institutionalisation, her texts show his influence thematically, structurally, figuratively and conceptually. Hyde drew on his themes and metaphors to

construct textual representations of her life history, her mental illness and the conditions of herself and her fellow patients at the hospital. She mediated imagery through his lines directly or through distorted echoes of his poetry. She plundered the same storehouse of literary icons as he had done, in order to write into her poetry representations of her mental state and her route out of the institution. Hyde sought to understand her suspended state at Avondale Mental Hospital and to undertake a dream or psychological journey. The visionary results can be read in her texts, including the 1934 Autobiography, which became Hyde's lotus-dreaming: 'To muse and brood and live again in memory' ('Lotos-Eaters' 110). But placing Hyde's poems alongside the Tennysonian texts to which they have links shows that though the poets had some shared concerns, Hyde effected a shift from Tennyson's wider philosophical territory to engage with the psychology of the individual, the route to mental and spiritual health and her social responsibility to leave the lotus island.

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### **Abbreviations**

1934 Auto	1934 Autobiography
<i>A Home</i>	<i>A Home in This World</i>
<i>YK</i>	<i>Young Knowledge: The Poems of Robin Hyde</i>

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